

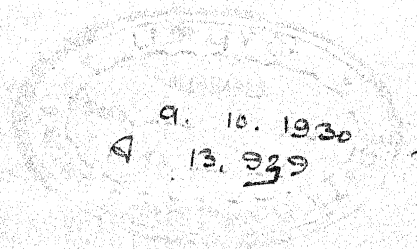
YOUNG APRIL

BY
EGERTON CASTLE



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YOUNG APRIL.

CHAPTER I.

"DEAR me, is it possible?" said the divine. "I must rouse the lad—his Grace, I should say—at once."

His morning cup of coffee steamed, fragrant but untasted; his crisp roll of bread maintained its barley grain shape, unbroken.

The Rev. Thomas Smiley bent over the open sheets and studied them again with protruding pale-hued orbs that were, in their surprise at what lay before them, scarce able to perform their duty and carry the full import of the tidings to his brain.

He passed his hand backwards and forwards across his chin; the rasping noise produced seemed to exercise a bracing effect upon his faculties. Casting a glance into the little mirror above the washstand—an envious little mirror that turned all reflections green—he murmured, "My toilet is not yet accomplished," and made an energetic move towards the small jug of hot water, covered with a cloth, spotless

white, if still damp, which the handmaid of the hotel had just deposited beside his diminutive basin. But, with his hand upon the razor, he paused.

John, the travelling servant, who had fetched the letters from the post office—English John, who must have left at least one sweetheart in distant Sussex, since he was so anxious to leave each foreign stage behind—who knows if he had not found his courier also, and whether he might not be beforehand with the wonderful news?

"I would be the first with the young Duke," murmured the clergyman. "He will have to excuse—nay, he will even perhaps feel indebted to me for this unceremonious hurry."

Mr. Smiley folded his dressing-gown about his portly form, thrust his feet more firmly into their slippers, collected the scattered documents upon the table, and hastened from his room.

The passage was chill and draughty with a window open at each end, and wet boards over which a slatternly girl was slopping with a pail and a bundle of rags.

The reverend gentleman felt the brisk morning air play gaily around an unprotected portion of leg, and the consciousness of a feminine eye fixed in the same direction imparted an unwonted liveliness to his gait, as well as a modest flush to his cheek, as he shuffled down the corridor.

The journey seemed to be interminable, his dressing-gown to shrink into indecency, his calves to grow into Brobdingnagian proportions. At length he came to a door where stood the pair of smart top-

boots familiar to him. Here he halted and knocked. Receiving no reply, he knocked again, and finally entered unbidden.

The sun—the gay, tender, young spring sun—was streaming into the room; but he who occupied it still lay plunged in sleep. The feather-bed rose in billows all around him. Of the sleeper himself there was little visible except a flushed fair cheek, sundry red curls beneath a purple silk handkerchief, and one outstretched hand—long, aristocratic, and boyish.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Smiley aloud. "It seems a pity to awaken him; he sleeps so sweetly. Ahem! Edward, my dear boy!" He laid his hand upon the bedclothes, a liberty which the sleeper instantly resented by grunting and impatiently pushing it off. "It is only," said the tutor a little louder, "a good conscience that could rest thus. It is pleasant for me to think that I have had charge of it. Hark to his regular breathing."

The other was now ostentatiously snoring.

"My dear Edward! My Lord Duke! Your Grace!"

"Eh? What?" cried the boy, sitting bolt upright. "Who said that?"

"It is I," said his mentor, bowing with a mixture of servility and pomposity. "I have hastened to your bedside, charged, I grieve to have to announce it to you, with melancholy, unexpectedly melancholy and startling tidings."

"What is it that you called me?"

"My dear boy."

"Pshaw! It was not that. What are your tidings?"

"John, whom I despatched the first thing this morning to the post, returned a few moments ago with a packet of letters addressed to me. These, I find, contain news of such moment to yourself that I lost not an instant—I came, as you see, just as I am, in this negligent attire. I have been commissioned by your aunt, the widow of my late lamented gracious patron, to break to—your Grace——"

"Is my uncle dead?" asked the young man quietly.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away," said Mr. Smiley. "'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' Your Grace is now the Duke of Rochester."

He rolled the title upon his tongue, with even more loving unction than the text.

"Oh, indeed!" said his pupil, and allowed himself to subside slowly upon his pillows.

"Compose yourself, my dear Edward; I beg you to compose yourself. Pray recall all those principles of Christian virtue and high-bred self-control which it has been my duty and pleasure to instil into your young mind while you have been under my care. All flesh is grass, as the Psalmist has it. One cometh like a thief in the night, eh?"

The new Duke was waving his hand impatiently.

"Cut that, Mr. Smiley, and give me the letters."

The bosom of Thomas Smiley swelled beneath the folds of his night attire. A gleam flickered in his pale eye, but it was only for a moment.

"If you will allow me, my dear young friend, I

will peruse these documents aloud ; they are addressed to me, and will therefore more fitly permeate to you through me, if I may so express myself ; such, at least, I gather to be the wish of your bereaved relative."

He who had gone to bed as plain Edward Warren-der and now awoke as Duke of Rochester, Marquis of Braemar, Baron Clontarf, and what not besides, made to this speech no reply. The parson, taking silence for consent, settled his bulk upon a horsehair chair, and addressed a triangular portion of white chin which was all that was vouchsafed to his vision of his exalted pupil's countenance.

" This is the communication from worthy Mr. Shaw, your late uncle's man of business. It is well," said Mr. Smiley, with a genial attempt at pleasantry, " to put business first."

The triangle of chin made no response, and so the tutor cleared his throat and proceeded :

" Ahem ! ' Stanhope Street, March 7, 1829.' Observe the date ; these letters have been a fortnight on the road, and have been waiting here for us at the Post, according to the postmark, a full ten days ; to-day is the first of April."

The chin wagged.

" All Fool's Day."

Mr. Smiley paused a second, but not being able to make much of his remark, merely capped it with the repetition of his previous entreaty : " Compose yourself, my dear boy." This was, however, not so indefinite as it seemed, for it not only established a future client on affectionate terms with a wealthy

patron, but also still shadowed forth for the time the authority of the guardian over the escaping pupil.

The Rev. Thomas Smiley had with a heavy hand ridden a very restive horse for the last eleven months. The question was now how to soothe the refractory animal into carrying him to his goal, or at least into allowing him to dismount with dignity. It would be an unpleasant experience for a gentleman of the cloth to find himself rudely obliged to exchange a seat in a comfortable saddle for a collision with the mud of the road.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Smiley, clearing his throat again with pulpit sonority. "Let us see what Mr. Shaw says:

"REVEREND SIR,—It is my painful duty to be obliged to inform you of the sudden demise of Mr. Warrender's uncle, the Duke of Rochester, who was found dead in his bed this morning. The cause of death, as reported by the doctors, is apoplexy. His Grace had been supping in town overnight, and it is apprehended may have unduly over-excited himself in the company of his friends."

"It is very melancholy," said Mr. Smiley, turning up his eyes. "Called from the feast, one may say——"

"Damned fond of his dinner!" came the hard young voice from the bed-clothes.

"But your noble uncle, my dear young friend, was one who kept his lamp burning."

"He burnt his candle at both ends, if that is what you mean."

Mr. Smiley's tongue faltered.

"He was ready for the call," he murmured vaguely into space, and, bringing down his eyes once more to the letter, proceeded :

" 'Kindly break the news to your charge, who now, very much sooner than anyone would have anticipated, succeeds to the title and estates, though still under tutelage until the first of May. In lieu of the late Duke, I understand that I am appointed guardian, together with the Duchess. I need hardly impress upon you the desirability of your at once conveying your pupil home. Her Grace is likewise, I understand, communicating with you upon the subject. The obsequies are fixed for Monday the 12th. It is unfortunate that Mr. Warrender's absence abroad should prevent his attendance. Pray give him my humble compliments, and believe me to remain,

" 'Your obedient servant,

" 'WALTER NATHANIEL SHAW.'

"Thus worthy Mr. Shaw. Now, my dear Edward, I take your revered aunt's—her Grace's—letter. Ah! my dear young friend, what a noble lady that is!"

The legs in the bed became agitated.

"A more gratifying, a more Christian, I may say a more inspiring document it has never been my fate to peruse."

His dear young friend hoisted himself up against his pillows, and sighed.

"Fire away," he said sadly, denuding his curly

poll of the purple handkerchief and running his hands through his hair so that it stood erect upon every side.

Mr. Smiley looked for his own bandana in the pocket of his morning-robe, but, finding that in his agitation he had omitted to provide himself with one, reluctantly prepared to deliver the document without tears.

"This is likewise dated 'Stanhope Street, the 7th'—the fatal 7th," he observed in preliminary tones. "Admire your aunt's great fortitude, my dear boy, who could leave the death-bed of a beloved husband to occupy herself with the concerns of others."

The Duchess of Rochester must indeed have possessed remarkable strength of character, for she had been able to indite, not only an exceedingly composed and business-like epistle, but one that was also very long. The young Duke, indeed, during the course of its recital, seemed unable to repress several yawns. Nevertheless he listened with a great deal of attention.

The letter was, however, as Mr. Smiley had said, truly edifying, especially at the beginning. The Duchess announced the irreparable calamity, which it had pleased the Almighty thus unexpectedly to inflict upon her, in well-rounded periods and with as nice an interpolation of texts as the parson himself could have devised. She made some allusions to her own overwhelming grief and to the kind manner in which Providence was enabling her to bear up—which news she felt sure would rejoice the pious soul of her reverend friend.

After this introduction she proceeded to give the same reverend friend very precise orders concerning his conduct with the heir.

" 'Pray impress upon your young charge,' wrote the afflicted lady, in her fine, flourishing Italian hand, 'the onerous nature of the duties which now devolve upon him. True, he remains still under my guardianship and under the business direction of Mr. Shaw, until he comes of age; but that date is only a few short weeks hence, a very insufficient time of preparation for the high responsibilities of his new position, for one, especially, so light-minded and headstrong as, from your last letter, I fear Edward still is.'—Ahem, ahem! this, my dear Edward, merely refers to what I thought it incumbent on my duty to say about that—er—little escapade at Vienna—youthful spirits, my dear boy—*juvenile vitium regere non posse impetum*. But let it pass. Note in what beautiful words her Grace proceeds."

There was a malicious twinkling in the blue eyes now boldly fixed upon the tutor that made the latter somewhat anxious to pass on to other subjects.

" 'I feel sure, my good sir, that when I chose you to accompany my nephew upon the grand tour, I chose wisely. For your religious and chastened principles were already well known to me, and each succeeding communication of yours has confirmed my opinion that you are the fit person not only to open the eyes of this young man's mind to the critical understanding of the divers works of art which you are so well qualified to point out in the different towns upon your progress, but likewise to open the

eyes of his young soul—which is far more precious knowledge, dear Mr. Smiley—to the duties required of a person of his future rank in life. And if my nephew has hitherto failed to profit by your excellent counsels, it is because——’

“Hem, hem, ha! The morning air is chill,” said Mr. Smiley, with great presence of mind coughing and endeavouring to extend his dressing-gown over his unclothed nether limbs. “But I have just concluded. ‘It is my intention,’ writes your dear aunt, ‘that Edward shall remain in your charge for at least as long as I have any control over him. After that, as the head of his house, his responsibilities—political, territorial, and social—will be such as will, I trust, induce him to lay aside once for all the things of the child. Edward knows the line I have marked out for him. He knows the bride I have chosen for him. She at least will be worthy of her station—for that I can answer. Your time, dear and reverend sir, will not have been lost, if you now seize every opportunity of instilling into your pupil’s ears the necessity of docility to the will of those to whom he owes everything, and who by age and experience are so much better fitted to judge what is best for his welfare than he himself, in the folly and exuberance of his youth, could possibly be. Edward has hitherto shown himself, both to his uncle and to myself, very recalcitrant to discipline, and to our expressed decisions for his future life. Indeed, upon my last mentioning the matter of his engagement to my daughter, Lady Sarah, he forgot himself so far as to make the unbecoming remark that he was not, if he

knew it, going to be tied by the leg before he had had his fling ! I repeat this unmannerly speech exactly as it was made to me,' " Mr. Smiley read on in hollow tones, " ' in order that you may judge of the extent of his opposition to my plans, and that you may know where to plant the word in season. But I think that when my nephew is made to realise the heavy charges with which all the estates that must come to him are encumbered, and the very inadequate means with which he will have to endeavour to maintain his exalted position, he will realise all the advantages of a marriage with one who can bring him already so large a fortune—not to mention the portion which it is my intention to leave him, should he be guided by my wish. These are circumstances which, he cannot fail to see, must have considerable influence upon his future happiness.'

" Lady Sarah Warrender is a very beautiful young woman," said Mr. Smiley, throwing up a sly glance at his pupil.

But the latter, looking down at his bed-sheet, wore a moody brow and seemed to be engaged upon some mental calculation.

" Is that all ? " he demanded at length roughly.

" But a few words more. ' Read him this letter, my good sir ; let him thoroughly understand my point of view. I am actuated solely by the desire for his spiritual and temporal benefit.' The last remarks, my dear boy," said Mr. Smiley modestly, " are entirely meant for myself, and are dictated with so benevolent a regard for me, that you will excuse my not reading them aloud. Her Grace

concludes by impressing upon me the necessity of my conducting you home immediately. We will start, if you please, this very day."

"Oh, oh, oh—oh!" cried the new-fledged Duke, with a yawn fit to dislocate his jaw.

"I will now leave you to your reflections," said the tutor, who was beginning, indeed, to feel the want of some comfort for the outer and inner divine. "Nevertheless, bear in mind that it is already past nine o'clock, and that we shall have many things to do before we get upon our way. Shall I send John to your Grace?" asked the reverend gentleman, archly bowing, with his hand upon the lock.

"I will ring if I want him," said the youth, with the same unamiable scowl which had accompanied his last observation.

"I would urge upon you to rise immediately and proceed to your toilet," said Mr. Smiley, popping his head through the door again.

"Oh, devil take you, Smiley! Leave me alone, can't you?" cried the other.

The tutor closed the door and proceeded along the passage with a very perturbed and perplexed countenance. An hour ago his pupil would not have ventured to address him otherwise than "Sir," much less to have sworn at him. Yet had he been conciliating in the extreme. Yesterday and other days, when he had ruled with a rod of iron, if the boy had rebelled, it had been under his breath. These were disquieting signs. The tutor shook his head sadly as he re-entered his room.

CHAPTER II.

THE countenance of the new Duke of Rochester as he slid out of bed and then remained half sitting, with a pair of slender, shapely legs extended, was that of one plunged in deep reflection. His hair stood erect, like flames in the sunshine ; his beardless face, naturally of a curious whiteness, not unhealthy, but singularly unaffected by passing emotion, bore as marked an expression of dissatisfaction as the somewhat impassive features would permit. A well-built lad, just done with growing, though hardly reaching above the middle height, *Englishman* was writ upon every line of face and figure. An air of high breeding was, after all, perhaps the most noticeable point about him, and with this an unconscious consciousness of race-exclusiveness in every manifestation of personality : in the curl of the lip that barely deigns to explain a speech, in the lift of the eyebrow over an inferior world, in the passing glance of the careless eye, in the level ring of the voice that expects obedience. Inheritor of fifteen generations of the great, the highly fed, the delicately nurtured, Edward Warrender belonged to the fortunate few who are born superior to the

toilers of the earth, and looked the part. But the soul within him was yet very young, and youth is youth all the world over. No man, be he duke or chimney-sweep, is twenty for nothing.

Twenty!

"I'll be damned," said the seventh Duke of Rochester, gloomily surveying his toes—"I'll be damned if I stand it any longer! For eleven months that jackdaw Smiley has dragged me from pillar to post—from Paris to Rome, from Vienna to Dresden—and never a step outside the shadow of his blown-out black waistcoat! Never an hour without his croak, croak, croak, in my ear, without his infernal rosy gills blocking my view of the world; never a guinea spent but must pass through his claws! Good Gad! am I always to be handed from one keeper to another, always to be tootled about life at the end of somebody's string? 'He shall remain in your charge . . . Convey him home . . . Bring the little dear into his aunty's arms . . . Let him take the pretty wife she has chosen for him—fie! fie! he must not kick, or scratch, or say he won't, for then he shall have no nice cake; and what is the good of being a Duke if you can have no cake?' Ah! the old lady has the whip-hand of me there, and she knows it. Not that I mind Sally; Sally is good enough for any fellow, even without her money-bags—too good with them to be let go in a hurry. But to make a man marry before he has had time to find out for himself that he is a man! It is infernal hard lines! Nursery, school, college; grand tour with Smiley; marriage with Sally—marriage!

Kids! kids!" he gasped; "and I have not even begun to kick the spring out of my own legs! 'Responsibilities,' 'social, territorial, political'! And that is my life—must be my life. Hang it all! I can't quarrel with my bread-and-butter. I wish to God Uncle Rochester had lived another five years, another ten years! I might have had a chance then to crack my nuts before my teeth fall out. 'Convey him home, my dear Mr. Smiley!' Convey the devil! I am not such a fool as to stay away when I have a property to look after, and a place to step into, and whole world of rogues to keep in order. In a month I shall be my own master, by law,—my own master! A pleasant fiction that! Till then there is a month—a month yet——"

The Duke of Rochester stamped his bare foot, leaped to the table, emptied a somewhat shabby purse, and made scornful calculation.

"Exactly thirty-six shillings and fivepence, reckoned in English money; watch and chain, worth—worth nothing—heirlooms. Damn! damn! damn!"

The young man dashed the paltry coins from him, went to the window, and tore it open as if breathing air had suddenly failed him.

A brisk, chill, yet sun-enlivened breeze rolled merrily into the room, fanning his breast and neck, blowing round his young body, wantonly making his fine linen shirt balloon and flap. He felt his blood leap under the caress, as a man's might beneath the touch of his beloved. He drew in the

keen air in deep breaths ; it tingled like potent wine through his frame. All the youth in him called out to the youth renewed of the spring world without, that was all movement and scent and sound and colour. Above, the sky was of glorious blue ; below, an almond-tree strewed its pink blossoms on the white cobble-stones in the corner of the courtyard, where the shadows lay black and distinct as if cut out of paper. The breeze brought the heart-stirring perfume of spring sunshine ; the swallows darted to and fro with sharp joyful cry. A maid stood by the pump in the middle drawing water into her bright brass can. She was clad in scarlet skirt and white shift. A stableman, coming up behind her, snatched a kiss from the nape of her neck.—Smack ! The Duke heard it from his second-floor window—and smack again, but louder, from the maid's palm on the man's ruddy cheek ; and much laughter on either side.

"My Gad !" said the Duke, "even that hind in his clogs is a freer man than I."

The air was full of busy, merry sounds : the jangle of bells, the richer notes of the Cathedral chimes, the hum of the town, the cries of passing vendors, the crack of whips, the striking of hoofs on the stone, the roll of wheels, the call of jovial voices. It all rose about his ears, and seemed to summon him out, with irresistible lure, into a joyous and unknown life.

Beyond the shadow of the archway on the left he could catch a glimpse of the street—dazzling white, ceaselessly crossed by cart or coach, man or

woman or child, all bent upon their way, all, it seemed to him, free to go and come as they pleased.

He knew that this street led out across the bridge and out again through the town gates to the high-road, and that the high-road led out across the green country towards blue horizons—whither, whither? His soul rose to the very edge of his lips and fluttered like a bird that must taste freedom or die.

"Thirty days out of my life," he murmured; "at least it is not too much to ask. Thirty days!"

As in his flapping shirt, in the full blaze of the sunshine, he stood leaning against the open casement, absorbed in conflicting emotions and thoughts, there wound into his consciousness a call, faint but distinct from the tissue of sounds without. At first, woven into the intensity of his feelings, it seemed merely their own creation, the bugle-call of his desires, but presently, dominating and intrusive, it aroused him to outer observation: it was the horn of some travelling chaise, approaching ever nearer and blown with imperiousness and frequency. Next came the clatter of eight heavy hoofs and the roll of bounding wheels.

The Duke's young interest was aroused; he craned out of the window, pleased in boylike fashion that the travellers' destination should be his hotel. The steaming, tired, sinewy horses were turned jogging into the courtyard and drawn up before the main wing of the house. The place became all at once alive—stablemen, waiters, and mine host himself, bowing and rubbing his hands, hurried to greet

the guests. It was a hired travelling chaise, laden with boxes front and back. There was a sleepy-looking man-servant yawning in the rumble beside a pert waiting-maid in green silk, who balanced a birdcage upon her knee. Behind the glass window the Duke thought he caught a glimpse of auburn tresses and of a white hand. He watched eagerly, and saw the innkeeper's bald head flash two or three times with the rapidity of his bows, and then beheld him gallantly assist forth a lady.

"Some Gräfin or Comtesse," thought the boy. "A deuced fine woman!" thought the young man.

Next came a vision of an alert, sandalled foot taking ground, of a splendid form in gray silk emerging from the depths of the coach, of a profusion of unruly chestnut curls beneath a befeathered hat. The white hand, upon which sparkled many gems, moved peremptorily hither and thither; a ringing voice, unmodulated and yet musical, gave sundry orders, right and left, and became presently very much raised in discussion with the postilion, who responded by a growling objurgation, inaudible, of course, at this distance to the listener, but unmistakably hostile. The lady, however, was decided and voluble, and came off victorious, if a resigned shrug of her John's shoulders might be interpreted to mean defeat.

"No great dame, perhaps, after all," said the Duke, "but, by George! she has a lovely face."

With an exclamation loud enough to be heard all over the yard, the object of his admiration now

heaved a tremendous sigh of mingled relief and fatigue :

" Phew ! "

She then mounted the three steps of the porch, snatched a reticule from the grasp of the obsequious landlord, and hung it upon her own wrist. At the same moment she glanced curiously around the court, lifted her eyes, and met those of the watcher.

CHAPTER III.

THE lady looked at the Englishman, and the Englishman looked at the lady.

He saw her eyes grow round, and an adorable red mouth part over the loveliest teeth with the most good-humoured smile in the world. Her hand went up, and, forefinger on the point, the gesture of an unsophisticated child :

" Oh ! but do me the favour to look at that one," cried she.

These words came shrilly across the courtyard, accompanied by a crow of laughter. And the fine proportions he had but just admired shook till the gray silk shimmered again.

All eyes went up : landlord's, waiters' and position's, lady's-maid's and stableman's, the very horses' and pigeons', it seemed. And, acutely conscious of his light attire, the young man retired, blushing, into the inner recesses of his room ; but not before he had caught a pleasant nod—nay, and if he did not greatly err, something singularly akin to a wink—from the merry-eyed lady on the steps.

It was not all youthful ingenuous modesty that sent the blood flying to his cheeks. It needs but a

spark to kindle a well-laid fire. Start at noon—with Smiley? Never!

"Thirty days," said the Duke—"thirty days are an eternity, and by the Lord Harry I shall have them!"

* * * * *

Mr. Smiley had recovered his equanimity. John, who had a nice hand on the razor, had shaved the reverend countenance to velvet smoothness, and there are few things more restoring to a man's self-esteem than the consciousness of being properly shaven.

As he proceeded to clothe his portly form in decent clerical black, a genial smile gradually crept over his features. He had acted mentor to many sprigs of nobility, but never before to a full-blown Duke. High in favour with this exalted person's nearest and most influential relatives, it would be strange indeed if some material advantage did not accrue to himself from this extraordinary turn of Fortune's wheel. He must, of course, win his pupil's graces, too, but that ought to prove an easy matter. Mr. Smiley knew he could be very winning when he pleased.

"A little judicious indulgence," said the clergyman, "will not now come amiss."

His mental eye applied itself to the peephole of an agreeable future. While he mechanically wound his white stock, distributed his curls, buttoned his long waistcoat, his lips formed, half aloud, broken sentences, and extended even more pleasantly under the process.

"The Rectory of Marlow, in the gift of his Grace the Duke of Rochester, has, we understand, been bestowed upon the Rev. Thomas Smiley, M.A., Oxon. This gentleman, well known for his classical erudition and extensive knowledge of art, and whom several well-known noblemen have entrusted with the charge of their sons during those prolonged foreign tours so necessary to the completion of a young Englishman's education, has but recently returned from the Continent with his Grace the Duke of Rochester. . . . We learn that the Very Rev. Thomas Smiley, M.A., D.D., Rector of Marlow Magna, Prebendary of Ely Cathedral, has been appointed Canon of Peterborough. . . . There is much discussion as to who will be chosen to fill the famous Bishopric of Bath and Wells. It has been rumoured that the Duke of Rochester intends to bestow upon his once beloved tutor, now his no less cherished friend——"

Mr. Smiley looked down at his legs : how well the violet silk would clothe that shapely calf ! He rang the bell and requested a fresh breakfast in so benevolent a tone that the damsel, mistaking its paternal character, showed unusual alacrity in complying with its demands. She was disappointed to be rewarded only by a benediction. Nevertheless, the suavity of the worthy gentleman sent her forth admiring, and he drank his coffee and ate his roll with as fine an air of duty well performed as if he were feeding the widow and orphan. He was comfortably reflecting on the immediate details of business preliminary to departure, and conning over

certain phrases of that reply letter to the Duchess, which was to be a masterpiece of its kind, when an imperious knock at the door was followed by the immediate apparition of his pupil.

"I should like a few words with you, Mr. Smiley."

"Certainly, my dear boy, certainly," said Mr. Smiley, hastening to advance a chair to the table, and obsequiously removing the tray.

The Duke sat himself down, folded his hands on the walnut table between him and his tutor, and looked steadily at that gentleman. There was speculation in his eye, but no hesitation.

"I think it is as well, Mr. Smiley," he began, "that we should thoroughly understand each other through the rest of this journey. May I ask whether it is your intention to treat me in the way you have done hitherto—that is to say, like a school-boy?"

"My dear Edward," said Mr. Smiley, greatly distressed, "you misunderstand, you have much misunderstood me. Consider the responsibility of my post. If, in my anxiety to prevent you falling either into the follies or the dangers to which Youth of his own essence is prone, I have erred on the side of conscientiousness—I may have done so; *humanum est errare*—it is never too late, the proverb hath it, to mend."

"Well, I am sick of it, and that is all about it," said the Duke, and drummed his white fingers on the table. "I am Duke of Rochester, peer of the realm, and if you think I am going to be hauled home in tow, and ordered here and warned off there, and

paid for and fed and put to bed, you are very much mistaken."

There was danger signalled in the boy's eye, and danger in the emphatic slap with which he closed his sentence; danger, too, in the snap of his jaw. The wise man is never so wise as when he yields in time. So thought the future Canon of Peterborough.

"Quite so, my young friend; I fully understand; indeed, in your position this would be unbecoming. Far be it from me to thwart you in any legitimate desire. You shall have the general arrangement of all our plans. I propose that we shall leave to-day, after the mid-day meal. You can yourself give the orders to John and the landlord; and if you like to pick the horses for the first post," said Mr. Smiley, pleasantly conscious of his insight into the workings of a young man's mind—"young men like to display their knowledge of horseflesh——"

"Pooh!" said the Duke.

There was such scorn in the ejaculation that the comfortable rosy colour faded a little from Mr. Smiley's gills.

"If your Grace should desire," said he in a flustered way, "a small advance from the funds entrusted to me for our expenses, I should be most willing to meet you in the matter. It is not," said the parson with a pale smile, "exactly in accordance with the instructions given to me by your worthy aunt, but I think I may stretch a point."

He rose and drew a leather case from the inner recess of a black bag that stood beside his bed.

"Let us see," said the Duke: "have you plenty of money, Mr. Smiley?"

"Oh, plenty; we have been generously provided for."

"No fear of our running short, eh? It won't do for us to travel like tradesmen, now that I am—what I am."

"My dear young sir, trust me to know what is fit. All shall be carried on as beseems our rank; and though we shall have to travel post-haste, if we had to buy the horses instead of hiring them we could hardly spend three hundred sovereigns. I cashed our last draft yesterday."

His fingers fumbled with the openings of the pocket-book and displayed the notes which bulged within.

"I think," said Mr. Smiley playfully, "that I can spare you a five-pound note—a ten-pound note," he added hastily.

But the young man's countenance did not relax.

"Are all your funds here?" he said, and took up the pocket-book. "Is that all we have?"

"All, my dear boy, all," said the divine—he could not quite gather the drift of his pupil's question, but he was still determined to humour him—"except what is contained in this little canvas bag—a few gold pieces and silver coinage, change for our immediate expenses."

In the candour of his spirit, he drew the little bag in question from his breast-pocket and plumped it on the table.

Instantly, the Duke, passing the leather case to

his left hand, extended his right and firmly took possession of the canvas bag.

"He, he he!" said the parson, with an uneasy laugh. "Now you have it all, my dear boy; you have positively beggared me."

He extended a soft pink palm as he spoke. For reply the Duke placed the case in one breast-pocket and the bag in the other, buttoned his gray frock-coat across, folded his arms, and looked calmly at his quondam master. He could not, however, keep a little twinkle of triumph from dancing in each eye.

"An excellent joke," said the clergyman. "But come, Edward, return to me the sinews of war—or, rather, I should say, of travel—without which we cannot proceed."

The Duke gave a chuckle; but immediately checking himself, resumed his new rôle of dignity and independence.

"Mr. Smiley," he said blandly, "you must quite understand that the Duke of Rochester can no longer accept the humiliating position of having his own money doled out for him before everybody. Turnabout is fair-play: I am paymaster now."

The tutor rose to his feet.

"This is a most extraordinary, a most reprehensible proceeding!" he was beginning hotly; but on second thoughts, with a gulp, succeeded in controlling himself. "Come, my boy," said he, with a rueful attempt to recover his jocular manner, "let us make a bargain. You shall have a fair share of the money for your own expenses, and return to me the rest——"

"Not a penny!"

"Monstrous!" cried the enraged mentor, instinct and the natural man getting the better of his mellifluous veneer. "Do you browbeat me, sir?"

"Now, look here, Smiley: matters are considerably changed between us, and you had better make up your mind to it at once. We shall *not* start, if you please, until nightfall; meanwhile, you and John will be good enough to take your instructions from myself."

"Do not think," said Mr. Smiley, choking with the fury that compressed his throat and injected his eyes with blood, "that I will permit this unseemly jest to be carried any further? You have no right to the money of which you have just—yes, I must use the word—almost feloniously deprived me, and I have the legal right to control you and your actions for another month. We may be in a foreign town, sir; nevertheless, there is justice to be had—there are legal officers to enforce it. I should be sorry to resort to force, but——"

"I should reflect, if I were you, Smiley, before I went on like that," said the young man quietly. "One month! Is it worth while making an enemy of me? I have heard," proceeded the Duke, in a tone of superb insolence, "that there are some damn fat preferments in the gift of Rochester."

Mr. Smiley went purple; then he went pale. He put up his hand and fairly gasped. The lad held him under a hard, unwavering eye.

"I should be loath," repeated the poor parson,

whining—"very loath to employ force. It would, indeed, be against all my feelings."

His pupil gave a short laugh, and turned on his heel.

• "We shall not start until nightfall," he repeated. Then: "Do not expect me to join you at the mid-day meal; but pray order," he added, grinning, "anything you may fancy."

The Duke opened the door and stepped across the threshold somewhat hurriedly, for he found it very hard to keep from a very schoolboy-like guffaw of laughter.

• A plaintive appeal fell vainly upon his ear before he shut himself out:

"At least, your Grace—at least leave me a few florins!"

CHAPTER IV.

"JOHN," said the Duke, "pack my portmanteau. And for the future, John, come to me for all your directions."

"Yes, your Grace," said John respectfully to the first order (he had heard the great news during his ministrations to Mr. Smiley's chin); and "Yes, Mr. Edward—your Grace, I mean," with a grin, to the second.

The Duke placed his gray beaver at a knowing angle on his head; one hand in his breeches-pocket jangled the eighteen florins (those condemned thirty-six shillings of English money) with a charming sensation of independence; in the other hand he loosely swung an inexpensive cane.

"I must buy myself a malacca," said the boy.

He emerged out of the cold gloom of the flagged passage into the genial sun-warmed yard. The yard was empty except for the pigeons, the almond-trees, and the horseless chaise.

From the three low windows on the kitchen side of the inn proceeded the hum of many voices, the clink of crockery, and the steam of hot viands. It was evident that the serving-folk of the Red Eagle

and of the Red Eagle's guests were engaged upon their mid-day meal. Now and again a burst of laughter and a stave of song proclaimed that the performance was not unattended with joviality. This inner sound emphasized by contrast the silence without. Few wayfarers were passing in the street beyond, hardly a cart. The whole town was devoting its energies to the meridian consumption of pot-herbs and swine-flesh.

As the Duke stood in the middle of the deserted cobble-stones and watched the pigeons bow and strut around him, he felt a little puzzled as to what to do, for the moment, with his newly-acquired liberty. His plans were all vague, not to say chaotic.

The fact that he now could do what he liked with himself made him hesitate on the choice of any one thing. On a single point only was his mind determined: free of Smiley he would remain, and home to England he would not turn for at least thirty blessed days. He glanced at the vane above the brown stable gables. Which way blew the wind? South, south-east!

In falling, his glance reached the shabby travelling-chaise, and there his eye grew fixed. It seemed as if it was studying with earnest attention every rubbed and patched strap, every ungainly line, but in reality it saw not one item—nothing but a young, laughing face, a mocking glance, an opulent womanly form.

"I wonder," thought the young man, awakening from his reverie with a heightened animation on his countenance, "which her room may be?" His looks travelled vainly over the rows of windows.

"And I wonder whether she means to remain any time here? Confound that Smiley, he is always in my way!"

At this moment a door opened with some violence, and out came the surly postilion, bare-headed, wiping his mouth vehemently with the back of his hand as he strode along; he was also cursing freely.

He brushed past the Englishman without the least deferential sign, seized the chaise by the pole, and dragged it forward a few paces.

"May the hangman have all such, say I! To ride all night, and scarce to be given an hour to swallow a morsel—the devil's tail is on it! This is a cursed life!" He drove his fist into the rumble, dragged forth a cushion, and shook it venomously. "Confound her whims and fancies! I wish her veal chops may choke her, that I do!" He thumped the cushion so hard that he was enveloped in a cloud of dust, and cried forth again between coughing and spitting: "May the hangman have her!"

"You seem put out, friend," said the Duke, smiling.

The man cast a surly glower upon him, and flung his cushion on the ground. He was not an ill-looking fellow, nor ill-built either.

"And so would you be," said he, "if you had to put up with a life like mine."

"But surely," said his interlocutor, "'tis a fine, free, open-air existence, with change and variety, and little trouble?"

"Oh, yes," said the man scornfully, and now folding his arms, leaned against the wheels and

surveyed this admirer of a post-boy's life from head to foot. Then, as if impressed, despite his ill-humour, by the young aristocrat's appearance, he touched his forehead, and proceeded more civilly, but still with much bitterness: "Oh, ay, ay, 'tis a very pleasant life, as your honour has it. Yes: plenty of open air, and change, and variety—variety of weather: in winter, frost to nip your nose and your toes; in autumn, the rain, and the wind to drive it well into you. And has your honour tried the pleasure of trotting ten miles with the breeches on your seat (saving your presence) squashing out the water at every bump? And in summer there is the sun, white-hot on your back until the marrow frizzles; and there's the dust choking you. Oh, as your honour says, it is a fine life!"

"But in the spring, my good fellow, in the spring, on a day like this, with a breeze just strong enough to cool you, and the sun just hot enough to warm, and a little rain overnight just enough to lay the dust—come now, you will not make me believe that you have so much to complain of on a day like this."

"In spring, on a day like this," said the postilion biting, "a fellow gets a fool of a woman to drive, and she says, out of all reason, that it is nothing to her what the custom is, and that she *will* drive all day after driving all night. In the spring, on a day like this, when a man has got his Katie in the town, and it may be a fortnight again before he has a chance of seeing her! Devil take all such, say I, and the devil take a postilion's life!"

The Duke of Rochester was much interested;

less, perhaps, in the man's grievance than in the cause of it. So the fair traveller was making but a hasty halt!

"Where are you bound in such a hurry?" he inquired.

"Over the border to the Capital. And that is twenty leagues yet. But she means to sleep the night at the Frontier Bridge, and that is out of all reason, too, for the inn is not fit to hold a candle to this one, and——"

"And there is no Katie in that town," said the Duke archly. "Truly, now, you see how a man may be mistaken; for a little while ago, as I looked out of the window, I vow and declare that I thought you a luckier dog than myself! And I am not sure," added the Duke reflectively, "that I would not change places with you yet."

"Eh, does milord think so?" said the man, and this time broke into a grin. "I am sure I should not mind changing with him."

The Duke paused, flicked his top-boots with his cane, and again his glance wandered speculatively over the windows.

All of a sudden, through some open casement, the sound of a singing voice came wafted into the stillness below. There was a glorious upward reach, a sweetly prolonged note, a miraculous trill, and then silence.

"Oh!" said the Duke.

"There she goes!" growled the post-boy. He detached himself from his resting posture, aimed a vicious kick at the old chaise, and threw the cushion

Jack into its place. "She has finished her dinner and she'll be after me in a minute. Excuse me, sir I must get on with my business."

But a new fire had kindled in the Englishman's eye; he touched the postilion on the shoulder.

"Many a true word is spoken in jest," said he. "This exchange, friend, that would please us both so much, what is there to hinder its being effected, say, for a stage or two? What if the milord drove your horses, while you caressed your Katie?"

"Thunder and fire-blasts! Are you mad, milord?"

The fellow's eyes goggled, and his jaw dropped.

"I think I could put on your clothes," pursued the Duke, unmoved. "And I hope I can guide a horse along a highroad as well as you or any other man. I believe, too, that I could thump a cushion and kick a chaise, if that is part of the duty. Come, my man, it is a good offer. Three days' holiday, and your work done for you. Two hundred florins, and the price of your clothes, and—Katie's kisses!"

The lover of Katie had become quite pale under his sunburn. He glanced over his shoulder cautiously. Presently a slow grin overspread his features; he jerked his thumb in the direction of the casement, whistled a stave in mockery—roulade, sostenuto, and trill burlesqued. He then thrust his tongue knowingly into his cheek.

"If that is the way with you," said he, "why, step into the stables with me. We will talk matters over; the nags, poor dumb things! will tell no tales."

CHAPTER V.

THE lady had ordered her unwilling post-boy to be ready for the start at one o'clock.

At one o'clock the shabby chaise, drawn by two fresh horses and conducted by a rigid postilion, described a fine curve round the corner and was brought to a halt before the main entrance. The horses with pricked ears stood facing the gateway, sniffing the air of their road. The driver's eyes were fixed in the same direction.

If any of the casual spectators that now began to straggle into the yard had thought it worth while to examine closely what manner of man it was that sat in the postilion's great boots ; if anyone had had the curiosity to raise the heavy leather hat, or even push aside the regulation white tow plaits that hung therefrom over either cheek, breast-deep, why, then the idle, everyday aspect of the scene might have been suddenly and most piquantly enlivened.

But although one or two of the stablemen could have been seen to exchange knowing and humorous looks behind the postilion's back—an exceedingly conscious back under its green jacket—although from the grating of the pantry-window two cook-

maids and a waiter, and also a sunburnt, equine-looking man, in singularly ill-fitting clothes, were convulsed with a smothered merriment evidently connected with the ancient chaise and its yellow-breeched driver, no one so much as addressed the latter as the hand of the stable clock jerked its way to the quarter.

Seated at a table by the open casement, and occasionally casting a melancholy distracted glance into the courtyard below, was a middle-aged gentleman of reverend appearance, with a pen poised in an inert hand.

"Inexpressible, your Grace, is the sorrow into which the melancholy tidings received this morning have plunged me and my beloved charge." Thus had the pen written on the fair page, and inexpressible Mr. Smiley's feelings seemed to be, for he could proceed no further, but remained absorbed in cogitation of a painful, yet absolutely personal description.

"I shall have to employ ruse, I fear," thought he. "Perhaps to-night, when he sleeps."

His wandering eye swept over the post-boy's figure ever and anon, innocently. But so evil a thing is it to carry an uneasy conscience that this same post-boy, aware of the black-clothed scribe at the window, felt as if two red-hot gimlets were boring through the green jacket to his naked flesh. And in his breast-pocket the pocket-book (which was sizable enough to cause a certain strain on the breast-buttons) seemed to swell and swell to such an abnormal size that he could hardly draw a breath.

The postilion, indeed, was not in a state of placidity. Besides the causes for disquietude which were acting on his sensitive epidermis, his strained ears provided him with a fresh subject for alarm. Ever since he had halted before the steps on the stroke of the hour, a singular clamour, the noise of many voices raised in discussion, had not ceased within the house. Now it seemed to him that these rumours proceeded from the quarter whence that stave of song had floated out to ravish him a short time ago. And, as he thought further to recognise above the rest the same accents that had rated his predecessor in the saddle, if ever a young man may have been truly described as "sitting upon thorns," that young man was the Duke of Rochester turned post-boy.

At last the voices in conflict rose to highest pitch. Then there was silence, emphasised by the slam of a door. The postilion gripped his knees. Along the inner passage leading to the vestibule a feminine whirlwind approached with ever-gathering force.

"Oh, Lord!" thought he, "it is all up with me!"

Instinctively he rounded his back; but the storm was not directed against him.

Magnificent, overwhelming, with fold of silk blown out, it seemed, by the very breath of her wrath, the lady, clutching a bandbox and the birdcage in one hand, sundry shawls and packages in the other, sailed out of the house, followed by the landlord, burdened on his side with rugs and parcels. Her voice, rising and falling in tumultuous cadence, pro-

ceeded with every shade of feeling, and with no more break than was absolutely necessary for the drawing of breath, to narrate a moving tale of indignation.

"It is just as I told you, Mr. Host—the ungrateful slut! She owes everything to me. She was starving, literally starving, when I took her in. And ignorant! I had to teach her even to twist a ringlet. And such a place as she had of it! The wages I gave her! You saw that green silk she wears? That was mine—as good as new. She got them all. Not to speak of the presents and the tips. You may imagine, Mr. Landlord, all the young men, and the old men, too, that will make up to me; they tip her, of course—not to speak of the kisses. Well, sir, the minx is not satisfied. I knew she and Joseph were carrying on. I could not but see it. Only last night, as we drove along in the moonlight, I could hear them kissing in the rumble—not that I mind a kiss in moderation, but there is reason in roasting of eggs. And at dawn, when I looked out to tell Araminta (I call her Araminta) to give me my other scent-bottle, what do I see?—she is combing that rascal's hair with my comb—my comb! After that, said I to myself, there is nothing but marriage. My gracious! one must have some propriety in one's establishment. You noticed Joseph, Mr. Landlord? There is an ugly devil, if you like! Well, it was chiefly for that I hired him—and because he could make such a good salad. But, after all, if it is her taste, thought I, all tastes are respectable. So I just called them up

after dinner, and said I, 'I have seen your pranks, and it has just come to this: you will have to be married, my good friends. I will start you in business,' said I. That minx comes forward as brazen as you please. 'Madam mistakes,' says she; 'I should never dream of marrying Joseph.' 'Madame mistakes, indeed!' cried I; 'then, what do such goings-on mean?' 'Oh, nothing at all,' says she, 'nothing at all, madame, and Joseph will tell you himself that he has already a wife and six children.' A married man, no less! and six—oh, well, I gave it to her and to him too. And when I am hot, Mr. Landlord, things are pretty lively, I assure you. 'Who would have thought Madame so particular?' says Miss Araminta. Look here, now, if you had heard her you would not have believed your ears. Of course there was nothing to be done but to give her a good smack in the face, pay them their wages, and pack—out with you! Oh! I am well rid of such rubbish. But here I am, all flustered and all of a perspiration, and—my God! my God! it is past the quarter already. I say, my good man, open the door. Eh, what? What is the matter now? Your bill! Did I forget the bill? One cannot think of everything, you know. Here, take the box, take the bird. Jemminy! that is my best hat; be careful, will you? Where is this blessed bill? Oh! oh! oh! Mr. Landlord, have you no conscience? What is there about a poor girl like me, who has to work for her living, that you all conspire to squeeze her as dry as a lemon? Well, there, bother the change! Give Araminta her

supper out of it, though she does not deserve it. Eh, postilion, you will have to go at a round pace this time, I can tell you! I hope you have had a good dinner. Now, look at that sulky brute; not a word out of him! There is another of them. He is in a temper, if you please, because I expect to be driven. Next time I hire a post-boy it will be to sit on my sofa. Oh! la! la! Good-bye, Mr. Landlord."

The ancient springs of the chaise creaked as she flung her vigorous young body on the cushions within. The postilion tried to crack his stumpy whip, but with faint success, and dug his spurs into his horse. Lumberingly and cautiously they rumbled out through the archway, and the sun-burnt man, with the inexact fitting clothes, became doubled up with inextinguishable laughter as he watched their exit from behind the bars of the pantry window.

* * * * *

The attention of Mr. Smiley, who was seated in his bedroom looking out into the yard, had perforce been attracted by the noisy twittering with which the beautiful travelling bird had filled the air before taking wing. He looked forth upon her with a discriminating and censorious eye. Such were the dangers to which pure young souls were exposed upon their travels abroad, against which they required the protecting wings of some such guardian angel as himself.

"It is well," thought Mr. Smiley—"it is very well that this female is departing, and fortunate indeed

that Edward in his present wanton mood should not be brought into such pernicious proximity. There is a Providence watching over us," said the clergyman, and took heart to dip his pen in the ink once more, to continue his letter of condolence.

CHAPTER VI.

GIVEN a fair spring afternoon, an open country, beautiful and green, a level road running into the unknown, a pair of decently-stepping horses, it would be strange indeed if the addition of such units did not sum delight to a charioteer not more advanced into the mysteries of life than the spring itself, and as full of healthy striving and young untried energy. But if you add to these things that the same charioteer was whisking away with him (whither he himself had but the vaguest idea) an as yet unknown but most beautiful, most sweet-voiced embodiment of ripe young womanhood ; if you add further that this was the first day of liberty in a life of twenty years, and that he knew this liberty must end in thirty days ; that the jangle of bells rang out their merry tune as he trotted freely along ; that now and again, from within the coach, a snatch of melody from a matchless throat broke upon his ear, you will not wonder that the Duke's heart sang its own song—incoherent, inarticulate, but very joyous.

They passed little villages nestling among orchards ; cornfields where the young blades were yet only ankle-high ; but as wondrous green as

Hope; hay-fields bounded by gnarled apple-trees whose blushing promises were yet hidden in their powdered, gray-green caps; pear-trees white with foam blossom already; and rare blackthorns, the silvery treasure of which was drifting from boughs already clothed. Each tree in the copse was showing the first flutter of its coming summer garb—some more, some less, according to their nature. Delicately tinted from gray and amber to emerald and sunset-pink lay all the woods.

The eye stretched far over the flat expanse to amethyst mountains on the horizon. It was a lonely landscape; for there were no living herds or flocks upon the meadow grass, and field flowed into field, green corn into green maize, without any boundary-line or a single unsightly barrier.

The shadows grew longer, and the white brilliance of the sun began to wax golden yellow upon the land. An hour had gone by, and the Duke-postilion was beginning to think that, sufficient time having elapsed to place a convenient distance between him and pursuit, further acquaintance with the alluring fair one behind him would not be an undertaking attended by a vast amount of irksome ceremonial—if he only knew how to begin.

His travesty had served him admirably thus far; but he had his doubts as to its becoming his particular cast of feature, and he felt himself encompassed in a clinging atmosphere of old leather, strong tobacco, and stable midden, which, no doubt, might have a piquant pungency of its own, but which could scarcely be grateful to beauty's nostrils. In

perplexity, and amid conflicting schemes, he trotted on another mile or two, and then beheld two roads diverging, instead of one unmistakable way.

Now, he had been duly primed by his post-boy, but to what purpose? Had he been told, Take the right, or Leave the right? Unconsciously he slackened pace. Why had he not written out his itinerary? Why had he started so cocksure of his own capacity? Should he risk it, and run away with his fair charge to an indefinite goal? A road must lead somewhere, and the situation might precipitate a delightful climax. . . .

Under his forgetful hand the horses fell into a walk.

"Postilion!" came a call, as true and as loud as a silver clarion's. "Postilion, what are you stopping for?"

The postilion drew up altogether, his heart thumping rather quickly against the pocket-book.

"Postilion!" cried the lady again, very peremptorily, for she was evidently not a person who could lightly endure a check, "don't you hear me?"

The postilion cleared his throat for action; but, as painfully apprehensive of the first sound of his own ducal voice as a timid skipper might be of the effect of his first round, he paused again.

"Come, I say," cried the lady; "I should like to know what is the matter with you! *Postilion!* this is fairly maddening. *POSTILION!*"

"Ay, gracious lady," grunted the postilion, in as deep a German bass as he could haul up, and kept his head rigidly straight.

There fell an ominous silence, during which the horses shook themselves once noisily and puffed a deep breath, and the cage canary within the coach ventured upon a surprised twitter.

"Young man," said the lady at last, in grave and altered accents, "do me the favour of dismounting and speaking to me."

After a moment's hesitation, the Duke laboriously brought one heavily-booted leg round to join the other, slid from his saddle, and stumped slowly up to the carriage-door. Suddenly bashful, he was unable to raise his eyes to the lady's countenance; but he felt her searching gaze fixed upon him, and blushed—blushed so ingenuously that the very roots of his hair tingled under his monstrous headgear.

There ensued another long pause.

"Take off your hat, sir," said the fair traveller at last, "that I may see your face."

Then all the good mettle in the lad rose to the emergency; he doffed his hat with that grace of gesture inborn which not the cunningest master of deportment could impart to the most diligent pupil; he lifted his head from the bow with a little proud toss, and his brown eyes looked boldly into other brown eyes—the most beautiful deep-pupilled and black-lashed that he had ever seen. What though they were just now dilated with surprise, scintillating with wrath! And so the two stared at each other.

All at once there broke a little quiver of mirth upon the post-boy's lips—a quiver that presently spread into a show of white teeth and a dancing audacity of

look. Hereupon the lady's indignation, contained hitherto within a tumultuously pent-up bosom broke forth unrestrained.

"Upon my word, these are pretty goings-on!" cried she. "I do not know you, sir. Pray who may you be, and how dare you masquerade as my servant? What insolence is this? Why, I have never even seen you!"

The words had scarcely rolled from her tongue before she caught herself up and fell to staring afresh, a light of recognition dawning upon her countenance the while. Then all at once she clapped her hand and cried in quite another manner:

"Oh, gracious heavens! if it be not the boy in the nightshirt!" Saying which, she fell, being seemingly a creature of lightly varying moods, from her height of anger into a depth of helpless laughter.

For a second Rochester wavered, boylike, between offended dignity and the infection of her mirth. But the latter, and his own joyous sense of emancipation, carried the day. And the silence of the woodland and wide meadow was thereby filled with so strange a concert that the horses uplifted their heads from the tempting roadside tuft they were sniffing to look round upon them astonished. The Duke leant his folded arms against the open window of the chaise and filled the aperture with his head and shoulders.

"Yes, I saw you from my window this morning," he said tenderly, not sorry to give to his escapade an interpretation which, if not altogether the true one, could not fail to be flattering to his hearer.

"You are an Englishman," cried she at the sound of his speech, sitting up abruptly from her weak collapse among the cushions, and wiping her streaming eyes; then instantly falling back again. "You do not seem," said she, "to have caught a chill, anyhow. Just take your head a little further back, if you please. Come, now, all Englishmen are mad, or nearly so, I know; nevertheless, I should be glad if you would give me an explanation of this behaviour."

"Surely, surely——" said the Duke.

He who drinks a strong wine fasting is like to find it swiftly rob him of his wits. The boy was fairly intoxicated with his first pull at the cup of love and liberty.

"Surely, surely," said he, and he knew not how fatuous and foolish was his smile, "knowing that I had seen you, you need not have asked the question."

The lady surveyed him an instant keenly, but with perfect composure. Then:

"My goodness! what a pace you go at!" she remarked; and added reflectively, "I wish all my postilions drove as fast."

As she spoke, the horses, unable to resist the appearance of a peculiarly luscious growth of young corn on the wayside, began dragging the carriage with slow determination towards the ditch.

"Oh, oh!" cried she; "you must mind your horses, Mr. Postilion."

And the Duke had, indeed, no alternative but to spring to their heads and conduct them back to the middle of the road. Then, having ingeniously

attached the reins to some part of the harness, he would have returned to his attractive station.

But, determined, though laughing again, she would have none of it.

"Back to your saddle, sir," said she; "you have undertaken a duty, see that you fulfil it. Off with you! we have lost too much time as it is."

In his inexperience, he was not sure enough of himself to disobey her. He made her a bow, to cover with elegance his inner discomfiture; and forced thereupon to replace his hat, was acutely conscious of its disfiguring proportions and of the comic aspect it must assume upon a head so much too small for it.

A note of good-humoured laughter followed him to the saddle. He drove his heels into the poor brown's sides and applied his whip to the off-bay with a vindictiveness that surprised these animals into an unwonted start, and sent the dust flying and the old chaise bounding haphazard along one of the unknown roads.

CHAPTER VII.

THE injured post-boy kept his team jogging onwards at a pace so unaccustomed, that by the time they had reached a certain village on the height (which seemed to consist wholly of an inn, a farmhouse, and a few cottages) it was evident that they would have to halt and rest awhile before proceeding further.

That this was expected of all travellers, however, was demonstrated by the assiduity of a couple of stablemen who seemed to be on the lookout. These ran out to loosen the harness and rub down the nags, casting the while astonished glances at the unknown and peculiar-looking postilion, who sat mute and motionless in his place until he was literally forced to dismount by the undoing of the girths.

"Pray, my good men," said the travelling lady, popping out her rosy face, "how far is it to the Frontier Bridge?"

"Two leagues and a half," said one of the ostlers. "Will not the gracious lady descend and refresh herself within till her horses are fed?"

"I thank you, no," said the lady. "I am provided with all I require here in the carriage. But

perhaps my postilion"—here a trill of mirth ran in her tone—"would feel the better of a drink."

"Oh," cried the ostler, "he shall have a tankard of the best that is brewed here between this and the Capital. Will'st with me, fellow?"

"No," said the postilion, in a strangled voice, doffed his hat to mop his brow, and stood with his sulky back turned to the chaise window.

The stablemen shrugged shoulders of surprise and disapproval to one another, gave each horse its nose-bag, and went about their business.

Then the chaise lady unpacked a box, spread her lace-edged napkin, and contemplated cold viands, cakes and fruit with no unfriendly eye. Then she put her head out again.

"Holà! Postilion!" said she.

The postilion turned.

"Will you open this champagne-bottle for me?"

She glanced at his handsome downcast visage with an indulgent, almost maternal smile. How mature is the woman, how immature the man, of twenty! What a gulf can lie between the two that are yet at the same point of life!

"Thank you," said she, and took the frothing bottle from his hand. "Come, sir, will you not take a seat within and share a friendly glass? To be frank with you, I rather love an Englishman. It is not the first time that I have entertained a guest of your nation, though never in such garb," she said, and laughed. "But what does that matter? The coat never made the man. Come in, come in!"

Her tone was so sweet, her glance so winning, that

the young man would have been a churl indeed had he resisted.

"Mind your boots!" said she, as he clambered in and her pearl silk stocking was grazed by the unwieldy leather. "Here, sit you opposite. We will have to share a plate (praise the Lord, I have two forks!) and eke a glass—unless you drink out of the bottle. Ha, ha!"

"Drink first," said he, in a low voice, which sounded strange in his own ears, "and then give me the glass."

"Perhaps," said she, and nibbled a piece of chicken, "it would not come amiss that we should know of each other a little more. Behold me, by name Eva Visconti. (You may have heard of her. No? And they tell me I am famous!) For my intimate friends, Eva Beau-Sourire. By profession, then, singer. Just now upon my way from Milan to the Capital, where I have accepted a season's engagement as Prima Donna at His Majesty's Royal Opera House. I might have signed a far better agreement at Vienna, but I had my reasons. By birth, sir, true Viennese. By disposition, lighthearted. By good fortune, free as air; and, thank God, enough in my private little purse—at least, for bread-and-butter. The rest, discover for yourself."

"Now, heavens, there is a challenge!" thought the young fellow. And, like a puppy that may take umbrage at a waving straw, and yet, with wagging tail, will pat the burning bomb-shell, he was all eager to meet her advances as a very man of the world.

"I drink to Eva Visconti," said he, and quaffed

the glass she held out to him, intoxicated most by the knowledge that her lips had already pressed its brim. "Let me introduce to her in return Edward Warrender, seventh Duke of Rochester."

He halted, disconcerted to find that the announcement of her postilion's splendid rank produced so small an effect upon the lady that she merely raised her eyebrows with a look of amused surprise, which seemed hardly to amount to an emotion. A man of more knowledge of the world would doubtless have ascribed such an attitude to artfulness—an artfulness to be expected in a person of the character which Eva Visconti seemed to take almost pleasure in proclaiming. A seasoned skipper would have known how to steer his craft in such waters. But the wind was altogether taken out of the inexperienced Duke's sails. With a courageous attempt to keep his course, he, nevertheless, pursued, in tones of deprecating gallantry, and in feeble imitation of her own easy manner :

"By profession, nothing but her humble servant ; by fortune, never favoured more than now ; by disposition——"

He halted, for his eloquence failed him, but he looked unutterable things.

"How now ?" cried the lady. "Will nothing less than a dukedom serve you ?" And then her eye grew pensive as it swept over his delicate, clear-cut face, and fell upon the notable refinement of his hands. "Maybe," she said—"maybe. I do not doubt your word. Yet do I know one of your land who calls himself but a simple gentleman, and seems

as content with the title as if he had been born an emperor.

She sighed, and gazed out across him through the window. There was a minute's pause.

"But I," said he again, "think little of any title just now, save that of servant to you."

At this he ventured to edge a little nearer, and so doing, upset the chicken plate.

"La!" she cried, rating him; "this is what comes of bad manners. Both the good wings of the chicken! Throw them out to the yard-dog. Oh, take care of my Saxe plate!"

With this he dived; she dived, too, and the young heads touched. Now the fork eluded them, and now the spoon. The Duke's fingers now came upon the satin hand, and now, for a second, grasped the swelling arch of a silk-clad foot.

So engaged were they that the sound of a horseman cantering with splendid dash up to the inn-door fell unheeded, or not at all, upon their ears. Neither were they aware that the cavalier, catching sight of the chaise, had leaped from the saddle, and, having approached hurriedly, now stood by with folded arms, gazing in upon them as if transfixed.

With little screams, the prima donna still sought her belongings. If the Duke impeded rather than aided her efforts, who shall blame him? But everyone knows that to stoop after such a fashion is bound to bring the blood to the head, and once a man of twenty gets the blood to his head, he is apt to do singular things. For the third time Eva Visconti's curls swept the Englishman's cheek.

"I have got the spoon!" she cried; and raised an innocently triumphant face.

"Oh," said the Duke, "how beautiful you are!"

He slipped his arm round her waist, and planted a kiss straight upon her lips.

The lady wasted no energy upon screams or protestation, but her open palm descended upon the boy's cheek with the report of a pistol.

His brain reeled and he saw a thousand sparks. With a fleeting, ruthless recollection of the stableman and the Dorcas by the pump, "Is this the consecrated usage?" thought he, yet felt no impulse to merriment.

But space for coherent reasoning was not granted him. The cavalier, who had watched the proceedings of the pair with a deadly sneer on his lips, now, as if suddenly galvanised into life by the sound of Eva's unsparing buffet, shot out an unsuspected arm, seized the delinquent postilion by the collar, scooped him from the chaise like an oyster from its shell, held him upright, shook him as a terrier might a rat, and finally spurned him into space with a kick, inflicted in a masterly fashion in the very centre of the yellow breeches.

With indiarubber buoyancy, the Duke of Rochester rebounded from the cobble-stones, squared his slim arms and leaped furiously at his antagonist, only to be met by a blow on the nose which, uncompromisingly delivered, sent him down again, this time in a sitting posture, with the blood trickling from his ducal nostrils.

The songster's screams rang into the air:

"My God, you will kill the child!"

The officer—for such a smart light blue and silver undress uniform and a trailing sword unmistakably proclaimed him—leant an elbow on the open door of the chaise, and turned an irate, handsome countenance and fiery blue eyes upon its occupant.

"So, Eva——!" he began, in cutting tones.

But she bore him down by an overpowering flood of reproach.

"Well, and so, and so, and what is that to you? And who gave you leave to meddle? What concern is it of yours whether anyone kisses me? I had smacked his face—was that not enough? Just look! My Saxe plate broken; the champagne in the lap of my new gray silk; and the skirt, too, torn from one end to another! God knows how my poor voice will be after the fright and the screaming! Are you not ashamed of yourself? If you have injured that boy, Neuberg, I will never speak to you again as long as I live."

She craned her head forward to look out upon her unfortunate admirer; but, by a rapid movement, the officer closed the door, and blocked up the window.

"And are *you* not ashamed?" began he, leaning in, and speaking in the harshest, most grating tone of anger. "What! repel me, and hobnob with a postilion? Hell and damnation, Eva——"

"Hell and damnation yourself, sir! Take care, I have got the fellow to that smack tingling in my hand for you. . . . Fie, Neuberg! your voice is as ugly as a raven's! Postilion indeed; shall a lady

not share a glass of champagne with her postilion if she is so minded—above all, if that postilion happen to be a gentleman?"

"A gentleman?" echoed he whom she had addressed as Neuberg, the cloud of contempt and fury in his face giving way to an expression of the keenest jealous anxiety.

He turned to look at Rochester, who had painfully risen to his feet, and, wiping the blood from his livid chin with a white silk handkerchief, was measuring the figure of his enemy with a certain stillness of murderous intensity.

"Yes, sir," continued Eva Visconti vindictively, "and as good a gentleman even as you, Count Gustaf von Neuberg—you, who would have the monopoly of admiring a free woman! The young man is the Duke of Rochester."

Count Neuberg rolled his blue eye rapidly from the speaker's face to the postilion. Clouds of conflicting emotions chased each other across his countenance, which was evidently as open to reflect the workings of his mind as the bosom of a lake to the moods of the sky. Then he came forward a step, placed his left hand on the hilt of his sword, closed his heels, and, saluting in ceremonious military style, addressed the Englishman, who clenched his hands as he approached.

"Sir," he said, in a grave voice, hardly recognisable as proceeding from the lips that had up to now emitted such harsh sounds—"sir, my mistake was, you must admit, excusable. Nevertheless, I am ready to offer for it all the reparation one gentleman

can make to another. I gather that we are proceeding in the same direction. You will find me at your disposal at any place, at any hour, with any weapon you wish to appoint."

The Duke's balled hands fell open.

"Thank you, sir," he said, with simple dignity; "the sooner the better, if you please."

"Listen to them now!" cried the poor lady in the chaise. "Confound you, Neuberg! what has brought you here at all?"

"Ah, my dear Eva," said the man sadly, "I came to the frontier to meet you and escort you to the Capital, but when I got there my impatient heart pushed me on still further. But woe betide him who comes upon a woman unannounced!" he added, with bitterness.

"What tomfoolery this is!" said the prima donna, with an impatient sigh.

But the Duke, eagerly examining his future opponent in this his first affair of honour, could not but be struck with the accents of a passion beside which his own tentative experience in love seemed but the flicker of a match to a furnace fire.

Then the three actors in this little comedy became aware of a wide circle of absorbed and vaguely grinning spectators.

"Is it your pleasure, madam, that we should proceed?" said the postilion to the lady.

She glanced at him pensively. The boy seemed suddenly to have grown into a man. Then, sighing with some weariness of temper, she said:

"Yes, yes, by all means, let us get on."

Bowing, the postilion thereupon betook himself gravely to the pump, where he laved his face.

The horses, at his peremptory gesture, having been rebuckled to their station, he tossed a few silver coins to the stablemen, and mounted once more into his saddle, with the same gravity and sedateness.

"Really, these English," thought the lady to herself as she watched his movements, "there is something about them that——"

It was a very gallant figure that rode in blue and silver by her side in rigidly courteous, high-horse style, sitting on a full-blood dashing mare that fretted and fumed in vain against the restricted pace. But Eva Visconti cast scarce a glance upon him. She kept her eyes fixed upon some secret thought of her own, which had its sweetness, yet also its melancholy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE little border town was gilded by the setting sun as the travellers, throwing giant shadows before them, rode down the hill towards its ancient and decaying walls.

Ever stiffer and ever sorer had grown every joint and muscle of the postilion as on he jogged monotonously upon his hard-trotting mount. But the stiffness of his injured pride, the soreness of his swelling heart, surpassed all possible physical discomfort. Two hours' uninterrupted meditation on the indignities to which he had been subjected had not diminished his appreciation of their magnitude. Struck, kicked—kicked by a miserable foreigner—he, the Duke of Rochester! Was any weapon murderous enough to avenge, any blood red enough to wash out, such degradation?

His sense of mortal injury gave him so singular an air of dignity and of exclusiveness, and seemed to set him so much apart from the frivolity of life, that Eva Visconti, as she descended at the inn-door, ventured upon never a word of that mediation speech (to be followed by the sprightly supper-party) she had been cheerfully planning for the last

league of the way. He bowed to her with coldness as she hesitatingly regarded him. Inclining her own head in silence, she flitted across the threshold, and with an unwonted sinking of her spirits left the two young men outside.

When the last undulations of gray silk had disappeared from sight, the Englishman went steadily up to the officer and, looking into his eyes, said :

"You gave me, sir, the choice of time and place and weapons. I say : Now ; here ; and with the first weapons that can be mustered."

"Sir," said the officer, with a most easy politeness, "I am immediately and entirely at your disposal. But allow me to observe that you seem a stranger here, and that I myself know of no gentleman in this little town who could act as my second. Now, to-morrow we shall be able to reach the Capital, and——"

"Not so !" said Rochester, his ill-contained fury breaking out fiercely. "And do you think, sir, that I am going to let a night pass upon the treatment I have suffered at your hands ? I ask for no seconds ; get whom you will here to see fair-play for yourself."

Count Neuberg paused an instant to look at the slight boyish figure, the quivering young face, and to admire the spirit and high-breeding which could obliterate absolutely all absurdity of situation and attire.

He could have felt it in him to wring the mock postilion's hand in good-fellowship, were it not that the very points which excited his admiration were of

the kind most likely to prick his original jealousy into greater activity.

His face grew dark again.

"It shall be as you wish," he said. "It will go hard if we do not find a couple of honest men to bear witness to the decorous conduct of our meeting. There is a secluded garden here behind the inn—better still, there is a splendid room in the house itself, with a fair boarded floor—the wine-room, the very thing! This must Master Host lend us, and illuminate to his best resources, if we are to see to cut each other's throats. Yes, since, according to your wish, we are to fight to-night, we must even do so indoors; it will soon be dark. That is logic, as my friend Michael Spencer would say," he added, with a sudden smile, and (to the Duke's great astonishment) in very precise English.

It was so sweet a smile, and lit up so pleasantly a gallant manly countenance, that, with all the tiger in him athirst for blood, Rochester could not but feel its charm.

"The boarded floor by all means," said the Duke, also in English, from the edge of his haughty lip, and made an impatient movement towards the house.

"Stay, stay," said Neuberg. "Since we are to be our own seconds, my lord, give me your patience yet a little further. Say that I find two fellows to act as witnesses, that I secure the lighted room, and the requisite solitude for our purpose, we have yet the weapons to think of. The choice lies with you. Pistols?" said he, musing, and passed a reflective

hand over his chin. "Pistols doubtless you, as an Englishman, would prefer; but how get a decent pair here? If you have your own with you, it is all right. The pistol case is an item which an English traveller, as a rule, never forgets; yet in your present disguise——"

"I have none with me," answered the other briefly. "But you, sir, have your sword; can we not obtain another in the town? As for me I would prefer swords," went on Rochester, his right hand twitching as he spoke. Indeed, it seemed to him that a snap at a pistol, be it ever so deadly, would be but poor satisfaction to his injured pride. But hand against hand, blow for blow—have at him!—that would be something!

"If you prefer swords," cried Neuberg heartily, "so be it. It will be quieter work, no doubt, and we must not forget the lady. I have mine, as you say. We must get another by hook or by crook. I shall naturally take the weapon I do not know, to balance matters."

"Will you, then," said the Englishman, "see to all this? May I leave everything to you? Being a foreigner here, I could not carry things through as you could."

"I was about to propose it, Duke," said the officer.

They walked together to the inn.

"You will find me in my bedroom," said the young man, "awaiting your summons."

The other saluted, and they parted.

Some rumour must have already reached the

landlord's ears as to the mystery surrounding a postilion who spoke the tongue of the land in such strange accents, who dismounted and marched away with never a glance at his coach or his horses for he hardly showed surprise when this eccentric charioteer demanded to be given possession of the best bedroom free in the house, a warm bath, and a bottle of the choicest vintage.

* * * * *

It was by a dapper soldier servant that, an hour later, Rochester was informed that everything was in readiness. Although bodily refreshed by his bath, he was, nevertheless, in a mood of heightened irritability, having experienced considerable disgust at being forced to reclothe his nether limbs in those infernal yellow breeches, and to shuffle about with a pair of the landlord's slippers upon his slender feet. The impossible top-boots lay dejectedly, capsized one upon the other, in the corner.

"His honour the Captain lets it be known," said the soldier, "that he awaits the gentleman in the saloon."

Rochester leaped up, his tired face flushing. He shuffled forth in rear of the messenger, who tramped with measured clink of spur down the passages, and was introduced into a brilliant-illuminated, bare apartment, the door of which was closed and bolted immediately upon his entrance.

Count Neuberg, stripped to the waist, stood displaying under the candle-light the reflection of a miraculously white skin, while he discussed with a precise, rosy-faced, fair-haired individual in spec-

tacles the merits of two bare swords that lay on the table before them.

The strange gentleman was in the act of uttering a warm panegyric upon the virtues of their particular kind of grip, when the sound of the soldier's boots, and of the Duke's shuffling slippers, made itself heard. The Captain wheeled round.

"Ah!" said he cordially, in the tone of a host welcoming his guest, "there you are. Let me introduce Dr. Theophilus Lehmann, who has kindly consented to act as your second, my lord, and also as our doctor; and who has furthermore provided us with these handy instruments, which he assures me (and I have no doubt of it) are considered of the highest patent. Is it not fortunate," added he gaily, "that I should have discovered this learned and gallant gentleman? He is a person, my dear Duke, of every talent—able to carve a man open and sew him up again tight at the same sitting. He has the exact knowledge of the Code of Honour and of the niceties of a gentleman's anatomy. Herr Doctor, I introduce you to the Duke of Rochester, from England."

"Eh, eh!" chuckled Dr. Theophilus Lehmann, making a circumspect little bow; "much honoured—much honoured."

The Duke, looking ill-humouredly round, met the gaze of the most benevolent orbs it is possible to imagine beaming upon him from the circles of immense silver-rimmed spectacles.

"By the way," said Count Neuberg, "I believe I have actually omitted to introduce myself: Count

Gustaf von Neuberg, Captain of the King's Squadron of Rider Guards, and Equerry to his Majesty. And there," he went on genially, "is my orderly, Hans. He has a good knowledge of fighting, public and private. He will act for me. So now I think matters have been fairly well expiated. Doctor, we are in your hands. Hans, forward, fellow!"

With a pride that fairly threatened to burst the frogs of his dolman, astonished Hans saluted and immediately stepped forward.

The little Doctor took up the swords, compared them with great precision, balanced them in each hand, and finally held one out to Hans and presented the other to the Duke.

The latter, with trembling fingers, had meanwhile bereft himself of his shirt, while his sullen eye carefully scanned every detail of Count Neuberg's appearance and behaviour, lest he—Rochester—should disgrace himself by some least omission in this his first affair of honour.

As he stepped after his second, the drag of his slippers struck him with its absurdity and its discomfort, and with a half-muttered curse he sent them flying to the further end of the room, and then stood gripping the floor with silk-stockinged feet.

"Ah! what is that?" said the Doctor, halting in his elaborate pacing.

Neuberg, with a smile, divested himself upon the spot of his Hessians, and took his ground with a light dancing step, as if he deemed the innovation an actual improvement.

Dr. Theophilus Lehmann was as precise and exact

in the placing of the combatants as he might be in that of a bandage. At last, after holding the points of their swords together for quite an appreciable period, he stepped back with a sacramental "Go !"

The Duke in the exasperation of the delay, felt his young heart thump in a perfect frenzy of interacting passions, and was lost in dread lest the others should attribute to fear the agonised beating which must be visible under his naked ribs.

And there they stood, these two admirable specimens of manhood : one in its first exquisite youthful flower, the other in its perfect ripeness ; both handsome in their different styles, both gallant, both the hope of a noble line—and each bent upon nothing less than destroying, if not life itself, at least the symmetry of life in the other.

"Go !" said the little Doctor, and retired a pace, with voice and step measured to the neatest decorum, satisfied that he was conducting affairs as such affairs needed to be conducted. What, therefore, was his surprise and horror to see, on the word, his principal leap upon the antagonist like a wild beast let loose from his cage ; to see neither rule nor law of offence and defence regulate his slashing onslaught, but only the savage determination to cut, to wound, to maim, to kill. Before this assault in the light of nature the scientifically-trained opponent had no alternative but to fall back, guarding himself as best he might.

The poor medical second ran hither and thither, clucking his dismay. "Halt !" cried he, in despair ;

"halt, sirs!" But all in vain, and he dared not interfere bodily where steel was smiting steel with such ferocious rapidity.

Meanwhile the orderly, watching this scrimmage and noting his master's forced retreat, stood with a nervous grin stiffened upon his lips and with anxiety in his protruding eye.

Presently Neuberg's left foot struck the limit of his space, and his endurance of his opponent's reckless fury was exhausted. With his back against the wall, having felt that a blind cut he had failed to parry himself had only been stopped, just in time, by the wainscot behind him from laying his head open, seeing the Duke's baffled, livid face within an inch of his own, the officer, who certainly did not want to kill but merely to dispose somehow of a dangerous rival, and who had hitherto refrained from striking in the midst of so tangled a fray, now thought that the moment had come.

A push of his bare breast against the bare breast so close to it hurled the boy back a couple of paces; then, mercifully avoiding the unguarded face, he drew his blade with one swift stroke along the outstretched arm.

"Halt!" screamed once more Dr. Theophilus Lehmann, now quite hoarse.

"No!" yelled Rochester, and waved his sword high in the air; but it instantly escaped his grasp, flew across the room, and crashed to the ground, carrying a couple of candlesticks with it.

The defeated man whirled round upon himself as if seeking his weapon.

"Thunder and lightning!" cried Neuberg's strident voice. There was the jangling clang of another sword flung away, and the Duke, finding the world grown suddenly dark, and cold, felt himself caught up into the warm arms of his adversary.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER the clashing, the stamping, the shouting, the crashing, the scuffling, there fell a wonderful stillness in the room.

The Duke lay in a dead faint, with limp limbs supported on Neuberg's knee, and beautiful pallid head against his shoulder.

Dr. Theophilus Lehmann (reserving his comments *qua* second for a later period) was now nothing but the quiet surgeon, and, with spectacles firmly adjusted, was selecting sundry instruments from his case. Under his direction, Hans, who had collected candles and had produced a sponge, knelt beside his master and grasped with both hands the slim white arm of the wounded man so as to keep the long lips of the cut together. And the Duke's good red blood was over them all.

"Na," the Doctor was saying, "a clean cut with a clean weapon, that will be of itself a small matter. But his lordship the Duke seems of a nervous temperament, naturally high-strung—just now overstrung. So we will even do the stitching, which is rather a disagreeable process, before we call him back to consciousness. If it had been you, *now*,

my lord Count, I should have said the blood-letting would actually do you good. Can you hold the candle higher—just so ? ” and he bent over his work.

There now came, with flutter and patter, some one sighing and lamenting along the passage. There was a pause outside the door, a rustling, then a timid knock.

Neuberg started, and spilt the candle-grease. The Doctor glanced up, just once ; his blue eye was severe.

“ If you please,” he said, “ for a few moments no one must move.”

“ Oh, my God ! ” said a weeping voice outside, “ what has happened ? Neuberg, are you there ? ”

“ Yes, Eva,” answered the officer in unconsciously plaintive tones.

“ Ah, heavens ! ” cried Eva. “ What a voice ! You are hurt—I can hear it ! Is it bad ? Is it dangerous ? Ah, my God ! why are you all so still ? I thought your noise would have killed me, but this silence is worse, far worse ! Neuberg, for pity’s sake, what has happened ? My lord Duke ! my lord Duke ! Merciful God ! you have not killed that child ? ”

The timid knock was now replaced by the battering of two soft palms on the panel.

“ Let me in—I will come in ! ” cried the lady. “ Let me in, you there ! You are not men, but monsters.”

“ Eva, be quiet a moment, I implore you ! ” cried Neuberg, still unable, however, with the deathlike form in his arms, to give his voice its natural sound,

and perhaps not unwilling to test by this trial the real state of the lady's feelings. "Nothing serious has occurred; have a moment's patience, and you will be admitted."

"Ah, Neuberg," sobbed she, "you cannot put me off like this. Something dreadful is going on behind that door. I know it! Why does that poor child not answer?"

There was another pause, in which, from the scratching and rattling without, it was evident that the Prima Donna was endeavouring to look through the keyhole. This was followed by a wild scream.

"Oh, God! I can see you. Oh, monsters! assassins! let me in, or I shall rouse the town!"

"So," said Dr. Lehmann at length to Hans, taking hold of the bandage-roll, "I need trouble you no further, my good friend. Better go and tranquillise madame without; she seems a little anxious. But keep her from entering. This is hardly a sight for a lady. If you please, my lord Count, continue as you are for the moment."

Hans cautiously unbolted the door and opened it a couple of inches as a preliminary to the prescribed soothing parley with the applicant outside. He might as well have attempted to keep the flood out once the sluice-gate was ajar. He was borne down flattened behind the swinging door, by all the strength of the lady's vigorous frame and of her outraged emotions. With voluminous white draperies waving around her, she advanced upon the delinquents like some wild white bird flying to attack the enemies of its young.

"Miscreants!" she cried, and pointed with a tragic finger; "I knew it!"

At that instant the Duke sighed and opened his eyes, very dark in his white face.

"My dear madam," said the Doctor, "your womanly anxiety honours you, but there is not the least, not the very least, cause for alarm. Our young friend, whom I have just made quite comfortable, will be as well as ever in a few days."

"My arm is burning like hell-fire," murmured the Duke faintly, and shifted himself in Neuberg's embrace.

"Drink this little cordial," said the Doctor, stooping with a glass in his hand.

"I can hold it better," said Neuberg, who looked shame-faced, and avoided raising his eyes towards the object of his admiration; but there was a growing tenderness in his clasp of the wounded man.

Eva Visconti surveyed them both for a second in silence. A smile relaxed the compression of her lips, there was a light in her eye that can best be described as that of the lust of nursing—the lust which God has implanted in the heart of woman.

"Here!" said she, and could stand it no longer, but whisked her draperies over the red puddles on the floor, knelt down beside the two, whipped the glass from Neuberg's hand, and, inserting her strong round arm at exactly the proper angle under the languid head, held the cordial to the Duke's lips.

"Angel!" said Neuberg, who reverently lifted a wisp of her hair and kissed it.

"A pretty time to choose!" said she, with light

scorn, over her shoulder. "Leave the boy to me, and put a shirt on, for goodness' sake. As for you, little man—doctor, whatever you may be—had you not better see that the poor fellow's bed is ready for him and warmed? He is as cold as death."

"I perceive that Madame will make an admirable nurse," said Theophilus Lehmann imperturbably; "her suggestions are excellent." He paused to take his patient's pulse. "A little more cordial, if you please, first, before we attempt to set him on his legs."

"Hans, see about the bed," said Neuberg.

A little while later a remarkable procession might have been seen by any denizen of the inn, had not the landlord thought it expedient to keep curious inquirers from peering into what it might please a King's Equerry to conduct in rooms selected for himself and his party. It was advancing along the passage; Hans, sedate and highly-drilled, leading the way with a candle in each hand; the eccentric postilion, in stockinged feet, yellow breeches, and with a lady's mantle over his shirtless back, came next, evidently in a poor way, supported by the pink and pattern of Health-Counsellors; in the rear were the sky-blue and silver officer, and a splendid lady in semi-low attire. The officer was hanging his head, for the lady was scolding him soundly.

"You have reason to be proud of yourself," she was saying; "this is a pretty feat, to have carved the child who did not know how to defend himself. Oh, he knew how to attack, did he? Little wonder, after your behaviour on the road! You were mad

with love? Oh, of course, that could not fail—all the crimes you men commit are committed under the name of love; it is enough to make a poor woman dread the very sound of the word. You had to give the young man satisfaction? "Naturally! And a pretty satisfaction enough to keep him in bed for a week! And talking of bed, I shall be thankful when I have tucked up the lad."

"You?" said Neuberg, with a deep note of disapproving surprise.

"Yes, I myself, sir. Now look here, Neuberg, I am going to nurse that child, let you or any one say what you like."

Thus did the Duke of Rochester's first day of his month of liberty draw to its conclusion. As he fell asleep at length, worn out between fatigues of body and of mind, between the pain of his wound and the fever of his re-creating blood, his last vision was a silhouette of Eva Visconti's shapely form thrown against the wall in magnificent proportions by the night-light she was trimming. The last sound was the tread of Neuberg's restless feet pacing the passage outside his room.

CHAPTER X.

"THE wound," said Dr. Theophilus Lehmann, "is progressing very nicely—very nicely indeed. Na, when blood is pure and young it is permissible to have it run so hot."

Rochester, although scarce able to lift a finger, stiff to helplessness from his violent exertions of the previous day, lay back among his pillows wrapped in Neuberg's finest linen. There was a smile upon his lips, and a curious glad serenity about his heart. Had he not broken his fast by a draught of divine nectar, held to his lips by the loveliest hand? Grosser mortals might have called the beverage "coffee"; but he, who had seen it mixed by a goddess, knew better. Nectar it was. The same hand had buttered a roll for him, and the little slaps of the knife had sounded as sweet as so many deliberate kisses, and before carrying over the plate to him she had absently munched a slice herself. This had been the last touch needful to perfect the ambrosial savour of his repast.

Besides the exquisite novelty of the situation, it was beyond words delightful to feel one's self the sole object of a beautiful woman's solicitude.

She had come in upon his first waking moments

with a stream of sunlight, it seemed, and in his room she and the sunlight grew a brighter presence together every instant.

With the instinct of a born nurse, she had chosen to clothe herself in a soft stuff gown that made no rustle and was of a tender restful colour. He was too young yet to woman's ways to notice this, but the effect produced upon him as she moved from place to place was ineffably soothing and satisfying. She had rolled his bandages, she had washed his face with perfumed water, and he had kissed her hand each time it passed his lips, and she had rebuked him each time with a tap that was as good as a caress. She had brushed his hair with an ivory brush scented from her own locks. Once when she leant over him to shake his pillows he had rested his cheek against her lovely and tender bosom—that was a moment to treasure for ever.

After all this, there could have been no room in his mind for any rancour, even if the honest fight itself had not sufficed to wipe all spite away, and if rancour itself could have existed in his generous heart under the breezy geniality of his yesterday's foe. They had exchanged a grasp of good-fellowship: Neuberg's right to Rochester's left hand. And as Eva installed herself at the patient's bedside with a roll of filmy white knitting in her hand, Rochester could see without any displeasure that Neuberg seemed disposed to bear her company.

In this charming atmosphere he fell asleep, to sleep the profound sleep of the tired man whose mind is at peace.

When he came to consciousness once more there was a sound of low voices in earnest altercation at the window behind him. Between after-dreams and waking, he lay still and listened.

"Now, Neuberg," said the woman's voice in a decided whisper, "if you cannot control yourself, out you must go. I will not have our bargain broken in this manner, nor my patient awakened."

"It is impossible!" answered the man's voice in vehement tones, none the less impressive because constrained. "That was a bargain no man with blood in his veins could hope to keep. Eva, is it no use?"

"No," echoed she; "you know it cannot be of any use. Heigh-ho!" she pursued, "if he were but a little of your way of thinking, what a happy woman I should be!"

"But as it is," cried the man, "we are all miserable! Do you think, Eva, that if he cared for you I would ever attempt to cross his path, if there was even the remotest chance of his ever being in love with you? But he will never love any woman half as well as his own liberty. Liberty has been his bride for all the years of his manhood—she is ever the young and the beautiful to him. You and I, my dearest, would like something more substantial for a partner; but we live on a different plane from our old Spencer. He swims in a sort of middle region, between heaven and earth. We, my Beau-Sourire, are of the earth, earthy. Why waste your exquisite youth, your strength for joy, sighing for the unattainable? Listen, Eva, my Eva!—he is as

lead to you as I am alive—and is not a live dog better than a dead lion ? ”

“ If you love me so truly as you say,” answered she, “ then you will understand how it is that I must love on, since I have thrown my love before him, even though it be hopeless. Or, rather, that love is never hopeless.”

So deeply interested was Rochester in this mysterious discourse that he shifted himself gently on his pillows in such a fashion that over the head of his wooden bed he could now watch the speakers.

Eva was sitting at the open window, Neuberg was kneeling at her feet, holding both her hands. On the face of each were stamped grief and longing.

Outside it was raining—a sudden April shower. But all at once, across the driving spray, there slanted a ray of gold which fell on Eva’s face, and forthwith, with a smile, she softly broke into a song, a snatch of melody as inconsequent as light and as plaintive as a bird’s. And as she sang two tears gathered in her eyes and brimmed over.

With a sort of cry Neuberg seized her round the waist and kissed the heavy drops from each cheek. She suffered him with a sad gentleness ; then he sprang up and stamped his foot.

“ Oh, Eva ! Eva ! ” cried he, “ how sweet those tears would taste had they been shed for me, but now how bitter salt they lie upon my lips ! ”

“ Hush ! ” she said, glanced round, and saw the Duke’s dark eyes, just clear of the pillowcase, watching her fixedly. She burst out laughing.

“ Look at the boy.” she said ; “ he is ready to

devour you ! There, there, I must not make any bad blood to-day, or the little Doctor will scold."

She tripped over to the bed, and with a deft twist re-established the patient properly on his pillow, tucking in the disordered bedclothes. Then, stooping, she kissed him with a chirp that rang heartily through the room.

"There ! " she said.

Which was the blacker, Rochester's face or Neuberg's ? She looked from one to the other and marked their scowl.

"You men are all alike, big and little," she said.

"Eva," said Neuberg, gravely, "it is when you do such things as this that you give food to the evil tongues that wag about you."

"Heavens ! " cried she, and shrugged her shoulders ; "what is a poor woman to do ? Since I may give so much pleasure at so little cost, why not ? "

"That is a maxim," said he, and his brow was thunder-black, his voice rasping, "that might be pushed far——"

"You know best," she retorted hotly, "how far." She flounced out of the room, and, good nurse as she was, slammed the door behind her.

"What does it all mean ? " said the Duke, painfully excited.

"It means," said Neuberg, who flung himself into a chair, "that, for all that, she is as straight as a die. But it means also that I am the most miserable dog on earth."

He buried his face in his hands and groaned so bitterly that the Duke felt quite sorry for him.

Rochester lay silent for a time while Neuberg clutched his hair with despairing fingers, and the very room grew dark once more. The rain was again pattering outside.

Gone was sweet placidity, fond memories obliterated by a cruel kiss of indifference. Bitter, too, was the knowledge that there was a favoured he. An irritating curiosity concerning this mysterious person, whom even the fiery Neuberg named with loving admiration, began to agitate his soul.

"Who is he?" said the Duke, in a solemn voice, following the train of his thoughts. "Who is it that she loves?"

Neuberg leaped up and came to sit at the end of the bed.

"Ah!" said he, his face flushing, "who is he indeed? Why, it is no less a one than Michael Spencer—my own best friend. If you come to the Capital, as I suppose you intend to do, then you shall know him, and your life be the richer ever afterwards. Meanwhile, what can I tell you? He is an Englishman, like you——" But Neuberg's eye, measuring the boyish figure, said as plainly as speech, "Yet how unlike you!" "He is a man perhaps of thirty-five, who has travelled much all over the world, has had, I know, more adventures than we shall ever hear of. His past is mysterious. He is, in a way, a cosmopolitan. He has been a doctor. When I first knew him, he was a professor of philosophy at the University of Bologna, where I was in garrison."

"I know the name of Spencer," said the Duke

coldly ; " we have an Earl Spencer in England, and perhaps half a dozen county families of the name. What particular family does your eccentric friend claim kinship with ? " His lip curled a little as he spoke.

" Claim kinship ! He ! " cried Neuberg. " I wish he heard you. He claim pride in such things as birth or title ! "

" But, Count Neuberg, " said the Duke, lifting himself on his sound elbow with intensest surprise, " surely of all the legitimate sources of pride, race——"

" Yes, yes, " broke in the officer, " we know all that—that may be very well for you or me. Spencer is himself, and can be nothing more."

There was a silence, and the Duke looked musingly at his interlocutor.

" I came across him again, " said Neuberg, " two years ago, in Vienna. After that our friendship sprang up. That is the way with him : one is drawn to him in spite of one's self. Wherever he goes, the best youth of the country gathers around him. But he is too erratic to remain long in one place, too independent to stand the tedium of settled occupation. The intellect of a philosopher, the tastes of a poet, the instinct of a rover, " continued Neuberg, waxing warm in his loyal enthusiasm. " Wise beyond words—in theory. To hear him speak, you would think of a Socrates reincarnated, with the best of Plato, and a dash of St. Paul ; but when it comes to practicability "—Neuberg threw back his head, and laughed gently at some recollections—" you

find, bless him ! that the soaring philosopher is only the pearl of good fellows after all. His reputation for wisdom has preceded him here ; now he is at the Court of our King, who is a great reformer, and whom he condescends to assist with advice on many questions interesting to a reforming King."

The Duke looked and felt puzzled, sour, and withal incredulous.

"And so," said he, after a long pause, "Eva Visconti loves this anomaly?"

"Yes, Eva loves him," echoed Neuberg, beginning to pace the room, while his voice rang with a tone half bitter, half sweet. "And, as you have heard, she makes no secret of it all. She loves him, poor soul ! as generously and completely as she does all things. And how could she help it ? Who could blame her ? It was passion at first sight—the very day I introduced him to her. You ought to feel flattered, young man," added Neuberg, halting before the bed again, "that she should remain here to nurse you in this way, for it was to be near him again that she hurried on her journey in this way."

Ay, the postilion remembered the fair traveller's unreasonable impatience to proceed. And she delayed to nurse him !

It was the first time that he realised the fact, and the fact was most gratifying to realise. A shade of gloom began to lift from his brow.

"Do you think," said he, after a little pause, with a new anxiety in his accent—"are you so certain

that your friend will not love her in return? She is very beautiful, very captivating——”

Neuberg's lip shot the most good-humoured scorn.

“What a clever fellow you must be,” he cried, “to discover all that at once! But there, never fret! Michael Spencer is no more for her than she is for me—or for you either, all Duke as you are. There is the farce and tragedy of life for you! Michael love Eva! Spencer in love with any woman living? No, no. I should wish it in my heart otherwise for her, though I believe it would break my heart. But it will not be—that dreamy, roving bird has lived free so long that it will never mate now. If Spencer ever loves, it will have to be some strange being created to match himself, some quite impossible creature, more than half goddess, wholly *grande dame*. But Eva is a very child of nature. Eva was made for such as myself,” he added, and struck his palm with his clenched hand. “But, alas! she will not see it, and all the salt of my life seems to be gone out of it for the sheer want of her.”

“What are you talking of?” said Eva, popping her head in at the door. “Tra la la lira! See the sun?” She was smiling. Both looked back at her with a reflection of her own brightness. “That is right,” she went on; “good boys again! Do you know what I have done? Why, written and sent a billet-doux to the little precise Doctor—he is a gem, that little Doctor!—asking him to sup with us to-night. I have ordered such a supper, my

children! I went down to the cook myself; he has lost his heart to me. He will cook *con amore*."

The room was again flooded with sunshine, and Eva lifted her glorious voice and sang like a happy thrush.

CHAPTER XI.

"By the way," said Eva, suddenly dropping from a wonderful high note to her natural speaking voice, "there is a friend of yours, my Duke, asking for you downstairs."

The Duke's face went white.

"Is it," said he, in a strangled voice—"is it a stout man in clerical black? Oh, for Heaven's sake do not let him up!"

He gripped the bedclothes nervously with his left hand, as if ready to dive under their protecting shades.

"Ho, ho!" said Neuberg; "now we are going to have a little mystery unravelled. And who might the stout gentleman in clerical black be?"

From white, the Duke turned poppy red. Was the aspirant to Eva Visconti's favours, the rival of a dashing Life-Guardsman, and his opponent in a duel for life or death, to be exposed to derision by a schoolboy's tutor?

Eva saw his discomfiture.

"Come," said she, "I won't have my new admirer plagued. It is only my truant servant, and your brother postilion. You gave him rendezvous,

so he says, at the Capital ; but, halting here for inquiries and refreshments on the road, he learnt that we were still in the house. I was in the kitchen, you know ; I heard his voice, and pounced out on him. (I gave him a pretty soaping, I promise you !) He has brought your portmanteau, and a story to tell you about it, and is clamorous for certain yellow breeches, and a green coat, and a hat with pretty plaits, and for his little boots."

She pointed with the daintiest of toes to the two depressed leather monstrosities in the corner.

"Let us have the fellow up, by all means," said Neuberg, with joyful anticipation.

The Duke's countenance, which had cleared considerably, once more fell.

"I think," said he, "if you do not mind, it might be as well if I saw the man in private. We have a little business arrangement——"

Both Eva and Neuberg interrupted uproariously.

"Ah, but not at all," cried she ; "my post is at your bedside."

"And," said Neuberg, "your escapade, Duke, has so very nearly been a tragedy for all of us that you ought not to grudge us a little fun now."

"I told the man, in fact," said the Prima Donna, "to follow up in a few minutes, and here he comes."

Tramping feet were heard approaching ; they halted outside the door, and then came the loud knock of shy rusticity.

"Come in," said the Duke faintly ; and in walked Niklaus.

He halted, abashed at sight of the company, de-

posited the portmanteau he was carrying, scratched a salute with leg and hand, and stood grinning.

"You have brought some of my luggage?" said Rochester. "Thank you; that is well. Count Neuberg, would you be good enough to give me the pocket-book you will find in the drawer of the table?"

"With permission," said the man, clearing his throat, "I brought the portmanteau as your lordship bade me. I went to your lordship's servant with the bit of a note your lordship gave me—na, that is a chap after my own heart! We could talk little, but good souls understand each other, I told him," pursued Niklaus archly, as, encouraged by the genial smiles of his whilom mistress and of the handsome officer, he warmed to his subject—"I told him your honour had something very particular to say to a lady. And this Johann, he was quite pleased to hear it, and pointed out the old gentleman's window and winked, and put his hand to his nose—saving your presence, this way, gracious lady—and could not laugh enough that your lordship should so do the old gentleman. Well, Johann packed your lordship's clothes which I gave him, and I took the portmanteau into the town."

"Katie must have been charmed to see you," said the Duke, who was beginning to recover his spirits, as the dangerous ground seemed successfully tided over.

Niklaus's grin extended to inconceivable limits, and he gave a bashful shuffle.

"Well, then, your honour," said he, "Ludwig,

an acquaintance of mine in the hotel came to see me, and told me fine tales. First, that the Herr Pastor, when he found that your honour had gone, he was bad enough, but when your letter came he was like one demented. Ludwig knows a little English, and he says he never heard such language as that old gentleman used—never! He sent for the landlord and all the servants, and accused them of conniving. I was glad to be out of the way. And then he says, it seems, 'Send for the police, and get my travelling chaise ready immediately.' 'Right,' says the landlord. But when he comes with his bill, the old gentleman goes as red and white as beetroot and horse radish. And he has not a groat—not one. Ha, ha! For it seems your lordship had carried off purse, passport, and everything."

Eva and Neuberg exchanged a glance, and then fixed their eyes upon the Duke.

"Really," said Eva, "you are a promising young man."

"It was very neat," said Neuberg; "but hardly, perhaps, moral or kind."

"Oh," said the Duke haughtily, "I shall make it all up to him some day. But if you knew what I have suffered through that intolerable old ass—He is my—my chaplain," he went on loftily, under a happy inspiration; "but he presumed upon his position in the most unwarrantable manner. If I had left him any money," continued the Duke, blushing, "he would have been after me like a bloodhound. The only way to be rid of him was to anchor him. He is in perfectly comfortable quarters,

and has only got to wait till I pick him up again, or till a fresh remittance reaches him from home."

His hearers laughed, not in the least convinced by the young man's magnificent airs; but a tutor is legitimate sport all the world over.

"You will go far, my friend," said Eva. "Well, Niklaus, what happened next?"

"Oh, then, gracious lady, the landlord got very angry—he has a hot head, has the landlord—and he said the old gentleman wanted to swindle him, and that he would want the police himself. And when he found out that your honour's luggage had already gone, he said that neither Johann, nor the horses, nor the luggage, nor the Pastor himself should stir a foot outside the hotel till the bill was paid. And the pastor had to speak very meek and humble before he could be pacified. And Ludwig said that the chambermaid told him that when she brought him his supper the poor gentleman was weeping."

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried Eva; "does not your conscience prick you, you little monster?"

"Oh, pooh!" said the Duke; "he will be the first to forgive me. He knows which side his bread is buttered." Then he looked at Eva's dimpling mouth. "I regret nothing," he said.

The postilion received a further gratuity, recognised with delight, and folded his own clothes, and finally departed, hugging them fondly to his breast, apparently inhaling their well-known savour with rapture.

CHAPTER XII.

"DOES he not look pretty?" said Eva, stepping back a pace.

Rochester had insisted upon rising for the supper party. And as not all the Doctor's science could find a trace of fever in the pulse, the resolution had been passed that the very scene of the fray should be the scene of the feast.

"The friendly juice of the grape shall circle now where the angry blood lay red," said the little Doctor, and laughed genially at his conceit. He had made himself exceedingly smart for the occasion, with his best black suit and silver buckles that glinted again, and a satin stock of the very first quality.

But it was not to him that Eva's admiration pointed, nor yet to Neuberg, though this latter looked spruce and handsome and gallant enough.

Rochester had kept the little party waiting, and Hans, the orderly, alone had assisted at the mysteries of a toilet that was destined to create a new and splendid impression, to remove an old and sordid one. When at last—postilion turned into dandy

of the first water—the tardy guest stood upon the threshold and looked in upon them, half shyly, half victoriously, all three were surprised by the graceful apparition and remained staring at him a moment or two in silence.

“Does he not look pretty?” cried Eva then.

And, indeed, with the slender elegance of hip and thigh set off by the most exacting cut of an English tailor, with knee and ankle gleaming beneath meshes of close-drawn silk, with his wounded arm in its white ruffled shirt-sleeve slung in a purple scarf, the pallor of his invalid state heightening the original refinement of his countenance and throwing into stronger relief the depth of his brown eyes and the pale glory of his hair, the Duke of Rochester was as pretty a specimen of English youth as one could hope to see all the world over.

“Come, come!” cried the Prima Donna; “I am dying of hunger. It is as much as I have been able to do to resist drinking out of the soup-ladle. Doctor, sit you on my right. You, Mr. Postilion, come here to my left, and I will cut your dinner for you so nicely that you will not regret the little accident which deprived you of your right arm. Nuberg, my friend, sit opposite to me, and you can dream that you are doing the honours of my table. Oh, dear, what a good soup!”

Even if her three guests had not been already in the best possible frame of mind, it would have been impossible to resist such open-hearted gaiety. The champagne foamed in the beakers, the rims touched with musical ring.

"May all affairs of honour be like this one!" cried Eva, and drank.

"With your permission," said the Doctor, beaming in the unwonted delight of such company and such entertainment—"with your permission, most fair and gracious lady, one could scarcely wish all honourable encounters to be conducted quite so irregularly, however charming it would be if they could all conclude in this harmony—eh? Ah, my lord Duke, if yours be the English fashion of duelling, I trust I can never be called upon to be second again to countryman of yours. Positively, my dear Madam, I saw the moment when they both would be cleft upon each other's swords, and that in defiance of any known custom, rule, canon or law of the art!"

"Oh, goodness!" interrupted Eva, and tapped the speaker with her knuckles; "be quiet, Doctor! I do not want to hear another word about it. Did I not have enough of it, listening to them carrying on like wild cats over my head? And, O Lord! what I endured when, all of a sudden, everything was quiet as the grave. And none of you would have the politeness to answer me, or let me in. No, Neuberg, not another word about it—all's well that ends well: that is enough. Here, give me that salad, and I will toss it. Fill your enemy a glass, if the Doctor will allow."

"Moderation, moderation," said the doctor. "Na, I do not hold with such of my colleagues as recommend low feeding after loss of blood. Nature must be stimulated; but——"

"Then let us stimulate her by all means," said Eva. "A slice of ham for the patient, for to-morrow I carry him off, bones and baggage."

Her face radiated joy. Neuberg smiled at her, in curious sympathy with those very feelings which made his misfortune.

"Nay, but," said the man of medicine, "the wound must be looked to for many days yet."

"And it shall be looked to," said the lady. "We have a doctor for him, a doctor as good as you—and give him higher praise," she added, laughing, "we could not. Will you not come with us to-morrow, little Duke? and I promise you that I will roll your bandages for you every day."

"Oh," said the boy, "to the end of the world for such a bribe. I am only sorry," he added, turning to Neuberg, "that you did not deal a little harder with me when you went about it, for I fear this trifling scratch will be well all but too soon."

"Faith!" said Neuberg, "it is indeed you who have scored, you young dog. If I had had half my wits about me, I would have let you get in one of your neat little strokes. Oh, Eva," he pursued, and looked languishingly across the table, "what exquisite moments I have missed!"

"I think," said the Doctor quaintly, "that if our young friend *had* come in with one of these neat little strokes, as you call them, there would have been no more measuring of time for you, my lord Count. All you, madam, could have done would have been to put flowers on the grave of a most gallant gentleman."

"Doctor, you are a monster!" said Eva; "you will make me weep. Who can talk of graves with life before one? Long live life, say I. I will have no more talk about fighting or killing, I tell you; it is all to be good fellowship for the future. And, after all, out of evil good may come, and from the silly quarrel of two silly young men has sprung, I hope, a wise friendship—not to speak," she added graciously, "of the pleasure of the acquaintance of such a person as yourself."

The little Doctor smirked; his eye lingered on his neighbour with an admiration that the newly-wedded little flaxen housewife at home might reasonably have found objectionable.

"Certainly," thought he to himself, "these fair votaries of Thespis are dangerous creatures. They have a way with them, a way which is not to be denied."

"Gentlemen," cried Neuberg, rising from his seat, "a toast! a toast! I drink to the most beautiful woman in the world and the divinest singer—our Prima Donna, Eva Beau-Sourire!"

"Hip! hip!" cried the Duke in his clear boy's voice.

"Hurrah!" piped the Doctor knowingly, and put down his beaker empty.

* * * * *

An hour before noon the next day, beneath a fair spring sky, exquisite blue, with only a dapple of white and gray, under a skurrying, mischievous wind, there issued forth from the courtyard of the Toll House Inn a joyous little band of travellers: Count

Neuberg, once more the Guardsman *point-de-vice*, circling on his blood mare, and followed by dapper Hans ; the chaise that had witnessed such odd scenes, drawn by the bay and brown in spanking vigour after their long rest, and shining with corn and currying ; on the near saddle a grinning Niklaus. Then, in the gloom of the coach, Eva—a jewel in grimy setting—and Rochester beside her, still adorned with becoming wanness, smiling with the pleasant consciousness of having, after all, the best of the bargain—as indeed he had.

Off went the party, to the great admiration of all beholders, while the stable hens fluttered screaming on every side, and the stable-dog barked fiercely and wagged a friendly tail. Dr. Theophilus Lehmann stood under the lintel of the hotel-door to see them off. Eva's little handkerchief fluttered farewell to him all the way up the street ; he waved in return a superfine yellow bandana. Then, when they had passed the Frontier Bridge, and the stablemen had sloped back to their work, and the hens, clucking satisfaction, resumed their search for grain among the stones, the little Doctor, with a smile and a sigh, turned to take up once more his daily round.

CHAPTER XIII.

EVA beguiled the road with laughter and with song. But as the shades began to thicken, the mists to rise, the hour of arrival to approach, she grew pensive and gradually fell into silence and stillness.

Rochester was not sorry for the opportunity to feed in quiet upon his own reflections, and let his fancy play with visions of all the unknown experiences that awaited him within the walls of yonder Capital. Moreover, it was exquisite to lie back and feel the sweetness of his travelling-companion's presence permeate his being, to steep himself, as it were, in a reality which already exceeded in delight his most fantastic dream.

Within an appreciable distance of the town, Neuberg's voice, announcing that he intended to start ahead, broke in upon their reverie. The crisp canter of their escort's horses rose a little while above the sound of their own bowling coach, and was swallowed up in the distance before them.

Soon darkness closed fully ; the chill of the night and the weariness of the long day was upon them. Then lights glimmered, silhouettes of tall houses reared themselves darkly, the horses' hoofs rang

upon the stone pavements, the chaise rattled in streets—this was the Capital.

Eva now leaned forward, lowered her window, and gazed eagerly out, as if every passer-by must needs wear the face she looked for, or every house at least set forth the light of his lamp.

It seemed, even at this dull hour, between the business of the day and night, a bustling, cheerful, well-to-do place. The main streets were crowded: smart soldiers went by, outrageous swaggering students, tripping servant-maids with bare arms and neat aprons, comfortable fathers that cast vast shadows on the pavement as they passed the street-lamps escorting their wives and families to some place of amusement. Open cafés, mirror-bright within, disgorged the surplus of their tables on to the pavement. As they drove along, broken strains of music, the clinking of glasses, the laughter of cheerful and thirsty souls, resounded in their ears, and was lost again. By and by they entered a quieter and more aristocratic quarter of the town, crossed a deserted square, where everything seemed already asleep for the night under the guardianship of the budding lime-trees; passed an admirable church, fretted and chiselled, with slender upspringing shafts, mysterious with sombre recesses, rows of windows sending gleams of ruby out into the night, the grave voice of the organ pouring through the swing-doors on the hurried entrance of some belated worshipper.

The chaise now turned abruptly into a side-street, bordered by rows of trees and high, silent houses.

Before one of these it halted. Instantly a small front-door up a flight of steps was opened, sending out a cheerful little ray of lamplight. A comfortable, neat old woman, with a black apron, a flowered shawl crossed upon her bosom and a wizened apple face, each wrinkle of which smiled welcome, stood within and curtseyed.

"Do not get out," said Eva, pressing at the same time with her right hand the Duke's left as it lay upon his knee. "This is my future home. Niklaus shall take you round to Neuberg's, to whose nursing you may now, I think, be entrusted."

She stood on the top of the steps a second and shook hands with her landlady, handed out the bird-cage to the grinning maid that came pattering, bare-armed, down the steps, then paused a second.

She breathed deeply once or twice and passed her hand across her forehead.

"I do not know how it is with me to-night," she said nervously; and Rochester gazing at her, could hardly believe that this pale-faced, troubled woman was the dashing creature that had slapped his cheek one day and smoothed his pillow the next with equal self-reliance. "Drive on, Niklaus, said she, "and good-night to you both."

She entered the house, the door closed behind her, and the young man felt that the street had grown very dark, that the air of the chaise struck cold, that its recesses had become a desert.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WELCOME, Duke!" said Neuberg.

To a boy of Rochester's age, the favour of an older and more experienced man, of a man for whom he entertains admiration, is almost as gratifying as that of a woman. The chilling impression of Eva's unwonted mood and of her careless farewell was instantly removed by the heartiness of this greeting.

He glanced round his host's homely sitting-room with a sense of well-being, yet of surprise, for the place was almost Spartan in its simplicity: curiously different from anything that his English fancy might sketch as the home of a smart young Guardsman, much less a Royal Equerry. It was a long, low-ceiled room, with three windows looking upon the yet unknown square, draped only by scant white lace curtains; the floor of boards, thickly glazed with yellow ochre paint, was carpeted beneath a large central table with a square of brilliant drugget; the walls were innocent of decoration but for a rack filled with an extraordinary array of meerschauum pipes, two handsome regulation sabres crossed under an embroidered sabretache, and an enormous patch of sky-blue cloak hanging behind the door. The

furniture was reduced to the strict maximum of six horsehair chairs and a sofa, considerably indented in the middle, notwithstanding its uninviting texture.

The centre table was spread for supper with a coarse, but spotless, cloth. The knives were horn-handled ; two covered tankards, filled with a foaming and generous measure of beer, were flanked by a yard of bread. Hans, girded with a white apron, was in the act of placing symmetrically behind these a soup-tureen which gave forth an appetising odour of cabbage and good broth.

" You must be starving," said Neuberg, and, indeed, with that unknown savour in his nostrils, the Duke found that hunger was what ailed him most for the moment. " Your bedroom is next door, and Hans has already unpacked for you. Once more, Rochester, welcome. I shall be glad to feel myself your host for as long as you will call yourself my guest."

The officer, as he spoke, made a little bow. He did the honours of his bare house with as courteous a grace as if it had been a palace.

A few minutes later the two sat opposite to each other, each bending over a thick soup-plate, and nothing was heard but the play of spoons and a gentle liquid gurgle.

The Duke, left-handed for the nonce, could not wield his instrument with the facility of his entertainer. Neither was he sufficiently imbued with the customs of the country to tuck his napkin under his chin with the same heart-whole determination to remove all external anxiety from the mind. But

he echoed Neuberg's sigh of satisfaction when the last spoonful had been disposed of.

"Ah!" said the officer, who took a lengthy pull at the tankard, and wiped his lips with further gusto, "if only Spencer were here now, what a jolly party we should be! I half thought he would have come to see me to-night; I left a message for him as I rode by. Here, Hans, cut up that sausage for my lord Duke."

The Duke's tongue was as eager to taste the unaccustomed flavours as his boyish fancy was to discover the unaccustomed scenes. The very oddness of them added to their charm. To drink the amber beer out of lidded tankards was in itself an experience delightful after the ponderous course of vintages he had been systematically put through under the Smiley guardianship.

After supper the guest was installed in the hollow of the arm-chair sofa, declining to smoke himself, but watching with amusement the selection, the filling with Canaster (out of a green majolica cabbage—ominous form!), and the careful lighting of an immense meerschaum pipe.

Very soon his host became enveloped in a pungent cloud, which, if hardly fragrant to the Duke's delicate nostrils, was yet grateful to his feelings as part of the new atmosphere.

Neuberg, now seated cross-legged on one of the narrow chairs, now pacing the room with clicking spurs, hands behind his back, entered upon a most conversational mood.

"When I have had my smoke," said he, "I shall

take you to Spencer, to get those bandages of yours set right for the night."

"Does your friend practise medicine here?" asked the Duke.

"He practises," said Neuberg, with a shrug, "as much as he ever practised. You must know, Rochester, that a regular physician, looking at tongues and feeling pulses for a fee, he never was. Fancy Spencer running for the fine lady's morning megrim, or for the Councillor's evening indigestion—ha! ha! Preposterous! He will be bound to nothing but his own mood. If you think that he would accept as much as house-room in the Palace, you are mistaken. But the King professes to like originality, and it is his fad just now to try and collect about him intellectual people. The King," pursued the officer reflectively, and his alert blue eyes clouded with thought—"the King seems at a white-heat of enthusiasm for his adviser—long may it last! for while it lasts it must do good. We shall have to introduce you to him to-morrow. I think you will like His Majesty. By the way, not a word about the duel, mind you! True, we had it over the border, but His Majesty has a score of edicts about private duelling, and juries of honour, and Marshals' courts, and it will not do to flaunt it about that I, his own Equerry, drew my sword without his special sanction. It is one of his little foibles to like to have a finger in most people's pies—and when Kings have foibles, you know, they had best be humoured. He will know all about it, of course, and so will everybody else here, but we shall keep up a polite fiction,

if you please, that you have had a tumble from your horse, Mr. Postilion."

Rochester assented briefly. There fell a pause, while his host scraped the ashes out of his pipe and polished the bowl on his sleeve. Then Rochester broke the silence with a question :

"How comes it," he asked, "that you, an Austrian, are in this alien service?"

Neuberg shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, we are nothing, in this country, if not on the Imperial model," he made answer. "I was in the Life Guards at Vienna, a body which His Majesty, on his accession visit, had specially admired, and——" he smiled suddenly. "In short," he rattled on, "the King here wanted someone to command his Trabans with suitable dash and gallantry, and I was the man, you see. On his side, His Imperial Majesty, wishing to be pleasant, was willing to have me seconded. I accepted the post. Eva had an engagement in Milan; I did not care so much to stop in Vienna; and, of course, I never rested till I got Spencer here too. And there you have the story."

After another pause, he went on :

"Then, you see, nothing could keep poor Eva. As soon as her engagement was terminated at La Scala, she managed to secure another almost immediately here—much to my regret."

"Why," cried Rochester—"why should you regret it?"

"Eh?" rejoined Neuberg; and then laughed and echoed, "Why indeed? Well, what say you

to a little walk as far as our philosopher's lair before we think of sleep ? ”

The two young men crossed the empty square, skirted the railings of what, as the officer informed his companion, was the Palace courtyard, passed sentries who saluted the Guardsman with alacrity, a ceremony which tickled the Duke with a feeling of importance ; he glanced up at the vast building across the paved court of honour, and thought it looked cold and forbidding enough. They turned down a side-street which ran the length of the Palace gardens, and then seemed to enter suddenly upon the older part of the town, which was likewise the poorer.

The foot-pavement wavered and fell away beneath their feet, and the gutters ran each side with villainous smell. The houses stooped forward across the narrow way, almost touching at the eaves and granting but a ribbon of starlit sky to the upturned gaze. They looked through open wooden shutters into poor little shops, where unnaturally ugly women seemed to perform dreadful rites with unknown mediums and to carry on trade in gruesome articles of food by the light of dim tallow candles.

“ Heavens ! ” said the Duke, “ what a filthy neighbourhood your friend seems to have chosen ! ” And he felt his English stomach rebel.

“ Oh,” said Neuberg serenely, “ it is all right when once you are through. I have taken the short-cut, and it is but a little way.”

As he spoke, a cold, fresh wind began to blow against their faces, bearing upon its wings the vague

savour of timber and tar. Rochester saw at the end of the narrow alley along which, with his handkerchief to his nostrils, he was disgustedly picking his way the glimmer of dancing water in the starlight. The dim distance was broken by a group of slender, slowly swaying masts. The night's stillness was now emphasized by the creak of spar and cordage and the dull lapping of a ceaseless flow. Involuntarily he hastened his pace to leave the sordid atmosphere behind him, and involuntarily, also, he halted, as they emerged on to a little quay, to enjoy the sense of space and let the clean air play about him.

A row of ancient burgher-houses stood well back from the street, behind scattered trees of great size; their gabled outlines were jagged against the sky. Upon the other bank, as far as one could see under the mysterious star shimmer, the open country seemed to spread.

"See," said Neuberg. (Rochester looked, and saw a steady light shining, very high up, out of the black silent house-front, some fifty yards away.) Neuberg went on musingly: "See, there sits Spencer, burning his nightly oil.

"'How far that little candle throws her beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world,'

as he would say. He is fond of quoting your wonderful Shakespeare, 'who can,' says he, 'convince where logic fails, and expound where definition falters.' Yes, there is his little lamp, bless him! It is not, as you see, a fashionable spot, and our

richer burghers have long left the houses their grand-sires built to artists and the river folk. But Spencer has chosen his two rooms among a thousand. He has his working-room there, where you see the light athwart the jutting balcony, upon the west, and his bedroom upon the east, both as high up as may be, so that no glory of sunrise or sunset be lost to him. These great daily events of the world's life, of which, he says, we take so little heed, are his most harmonious incentive to thought. And then there is the tide of the river to watch, 'image of life, always flowing onwards, always coloured by its surroundings, always the same, for all it seems to change.' And then being human, and full of the milk of human kindness—see, I can quote your Shakespeare, too—it pleases him in his solitude to hear the hum of cheerful labour beneath him. This is the corn-wharf, you know," added Neuberg, "and it is the workers alone, Spencer says, that save the race from decay."

The Duke stood listening in the darkness, with the stream running its unknown musical course behind him, his eyes drawn to that watching light that seemed to beckon him into the dark, silent house. He was as one groping his way into a new land, where as yet there was no light, and where the people seemed mysteriously different from any he had ever known in his own walks of life. Even Neuberg, that gay, careless soldier, with whom he had thought to stand at least on equal footing, appeared now to tread upon unknown territory.

"Come," said the officer at last, "let us go in and hear what new thought our friend is revolving under that lamp."

And the Duke followed, feeling singularly excited, diffident and eager.

CHAPTER XV.

NEUBERG dived into one of his pockets, and produced an immense key, which he successfully introduced into the lock and turned with a scrunch. They entered and stood within a dim hall, lit by the veriest flicker of a lamp suspended from a squat, round pillar. It flung swift fantastic shades, and leapt and fell and leapt again, revealing bare winding stone stairs, wrought iron railings crossed in design, and three great doors barred and padlocked.

The air was heavy with a warm and not unpleasant smell ; it seemed thick with impalpable atoms. A dusty broom lay wherever there was space to lie.

While Rochester lingered to look around his companion pushed on with the indifference of familiarity.

"Once, no doubt," said he, waving the key, as his foot boldly attacked the first step, "yonder rooms held jovial enough company, and master burghers feasted and drank their wine in one whilst their wives and daughters span and embroidered in others. Now they are filled from floor to ceiling with sacks of golden grain and snowy flour, among which the rats hold revel—by night, for by day this is a busy scene. Keep close to me, Rochester ; there is no

light upon these two landings. Hold! I shall strike a match. We must not expose that arm of yours to risk. These rooms, you see, are offices."

He raised his light as he spoke, and Rochester caught a glimpse of more padlocked doors, framed in quaint carvings of Cupids, wreaths and cornucopiæ. Following Neuberg's tiny ray, he reached and crossed the black spaces of the second landing, and mounted in the wake of the gaily-flying steps to the third.

"Now we see Spencer's beacon," said the officer. And he extinguished his evil-smelling little sulphur torch.

Rochester breathed hard as he halted. A twin lamp to the one downstairs hung on the wall. A visiting card was nailed to the first door. "MICHAEL ARTHUR SPENCER" was engraved on it in Gothic letters.

More he had not time to observe, for Neuberg stamped his clinking heels together, as if in signal, and stood, his ear bent, listening, smiling joyously on Rochester the while. There was a second's pause; then the door opened, and a man came forth.

"Welcome!" cried a genial voice in English; and two hands were outstretched and clasped in return.

"I have brought the friend," said Neuberg, "him whom I wrote to you about, you know—the youth I damaged a little and whom you have now got to set right."

"Ah, I know"—with an undercurrent of good-natured laughter. "Come in, both of you; you are very welcome."

The speaker nodded kindly at Rochester. At the

same moment this latter found himself taken by the left hand and led into the room, where, rather bewildered, he took the chair indicated, and sat looking at his host, all other feelings for the moment lost in curiosity and surprise. A thousand fancy portraits had he drawn of this countryman of his, but not one of them had approached the reality.

This was a man whose stature did not at first sight seem above the middle height, nor whose frame create any impression of unusual breadth, yet one beside whom the stalwart Neuberg himself seemed almost insignificant—a man cast in a generous mould, but so harmoniously proportioned that neither height nor breadth obtruded upon notice. Perhaps it might have been the spiritual strength of the countenance which overpowered the mere physical impression.

For it was a noble head, set nobly ; with a cloud of dark hair receding already from the dome of a forehead broad and high ; with large, reposeful, clean-carved features. The mouth under the dark moustache was as sensitive as a woman's, and the eyes——

Mr. Spencer had been exchanging a few words apart with Neuberg, but now he looked suddenly, with a kind of grave searching, at his visitor.

Rochester had never fallen under the gaze of such eyes before. Mild, beautiful brown eyes they were, shadowy and deep with thought ; they seemed to read into his very soul and rob his will of the power of resistance ; he felt as if all his personality lay bare before them, and felt, too, what a poor, everyday

personality it was. The sensation was so painful and so unusual that the young man grew white ; but presently the other smiled.

"Come, my boy," said he gaily, "and let us see this dreadful wound."

Instantly the Duke's suspended energies ran free and warm once more ; it was as if he had been tested and accepted. And he rejoiced, completely forgetting that he was a person of rank and importance, and entitled to be addressed otherwise than with this condescending familiarity.

"Thank you, sir," he said in a voice that was well-nigh humble. And Neuberg, who had anxiously watched to see what impression the new friend would create on the old one, breathed a sigh of relief, and came forward to assist the patient.

Dr. Theophilus Lehmann's fingers had been dexterous enough in their manipulation, but this new physician held the arm and raised the bandage with a touch inconceivably light where it acted, inconceivably soothing where it rested. The brown eyes, grown keen, were bent for a second on the wound exposed.

"I never," said he then, "saw a neater cut, or one more deftly sealed." Then he bade the boy play with his fingers on the table, and looked up at Neuberg.

"But had your blade gone but the tenth part of an inch higher," he added, "your friend would never have used that hand again."

"Oh, Lord !" said Neuberg, to whom a sword-cut

(and he had experienced some himself), if it did not kill, had always seemed such a simple affair.

"Never look so concerned," said Spencer; "for if we had to trouble about the might-have-been in life, man's responsibilities would indeed assume terrible proportions. Wait a moment till I get some bandages from the cupboard."

With his arm extended in the place cleared for it amid the litter of paper and books upon the table, Rochester, freed from the compelling presence of his host, was able to devote some attention to his room.

It was as bare as Neuberg's own quarters of all luxury of furniture, but walled with books that were heaped along rough shelves without any attention to symmetry or even order. Bare were the boards to the feet, uncurtained the windows, now black against the night. In a corner was a high desk at which to work standing; manuscripts lay upon it, and a great worm-eaten book. On all sides, pinned to the wainscot like so many butterflies, were little scraps of paper scrawled with notes. Nevertheless, in acute contrast with this ascetic plainness, several pictures of heterogeneous character but of unmistakable merit hung on the walls. A seascape of Backhuysen's, an old engraving of the vision of St. Helena, a curious water-colour of birds wildly driven before a storm, a Romney-like portrait of a beautiful woman. On the oilskin-covered table, among the shabby books and loose sheets, stood a bronze inkstand of exquisite workmanship, fit for a King's *escritoire*, and beside it a seal wrought in gold and ivory that a Queen might find pleasure in handling.

More perplexed than ever by his observations, the Duke now turned to scrutinise once more his new acquaintance as the latter re-entered the room. The same anomaly seemed to exist in his appearance as in his surroundings. He wore a loose cashmere dressing-gown, his shirt, of finest and whitest linen, hung carelessly open at the neck with frayed collar ends and loosely-knotted tie. The wide trousers were gathered round the waist with a sash of black silk ; but that they had been cut by a master of his art they still testified at every fold. The feet, arched and slender, moved in faded crimson babouches.

Rochester wondered, felt disposed to criticise, came again under the magnetic glance, and again succumbed to the power of the charm.

"I will put no dressing upon a wound that is doing its own work so well," said Spencer, beginning his task, and delicately winding the strip of linen round the arm. "There is, I always hold, far too much interference with the *vis medicatrix naturæ* in our systems. In a week, my dear fellow, I will remove these stitches, which I may tell you," he added, laughing, "will be by far the most unpleasant episode of your honourable transaction."

"Oh," said Neuberg, "he is not to be pitied, I assure you. You should have seen how Eva comforted him."

"Eva?" cried his friend, his face lighting. "By the way, she sent me a line to-night, asking me to go round to her. But it was impossible, for the same reason that I could not go to you—and that I will tell you by-and-by, for it is not a story one can lightly

introduce. There, young duellist, I have done." He rolled down Rochester's sleeve, and replaced the arm in its sling with his velvet touch. "Well," he remarked, "now that you have had your wild-beast fling at each other, each thirsting to destroy a life that a little further acquaintance has shown capable of adding a value to your own, confess that you are ashamed of yourselves!"

"Quite wrong, Michael," responded Neuberg, with a transient show of pique; "I never in any way thirsted for the life of my friend there. On the contrary, it was because of the sympathy he inspired me with, and my admiration for his gallant demeanour, that I offered him the chance of a decorous encounter, as the only possible reparation for a slight bestowed upon him in ignorance of his quality. There was nothing of the wild beast about the matter."

"Honourable encounter! Reparation!" repeated Spencer, with much scorn.

Meanwhile the Duke, who could not yet bear any allusion, however delicately veiled, to the primary cause of the meeting, and who, on the other hand, felt conscious that he at least had indeed thirsted for Neuberg's life and that there had undoubtedly been a good deal of the wild beast about him, sat and listened in great discomfiture.

"Reparation! Well, I hope that half a yard of steel edge in his arm, and a fortnight's inconvenience, will have quite compensated the Duke of Rochester for any injury he may have suffered at your hands. And if that blade of yours had alighted on his neck,

or his flank, or in almost any other direction, your reparation might have gone the length of sending him at once to the next world. No, no, Gustaf; fighting prompted only by the brute instinct of destruction is deplorable enough, the duel, but for the satisfaction of that nebulous entity the 'point of honour,' is a monstrous absurdity. What, sir," the Philosopher went on, with increasing emphasis as he warmed to his thesis—"what? I am grievously injured by a man, and, to please my nice sense of honour, I am to find satisfaction in giving him who has done me that very injury the opportunity of further robbing me of life, or at least of maiming me, and of generally asserting the superiority of his position! Don't give me as an argument that I have the same opportunity. What sense of reparation for injured honour can you find in the chance, the luck, the *alea jacta*, of sword-stroke, or hair-trigger? Your honourable duels, my friends, are merely a travesty of the mediæval superstition concerning trial by combat under the judgment of God." He paused, and looked triumphant defiance at the two young men. Rochester smiled faintly. As for Neuberg, he was now contemplating the Philosopher with friendly eyes and laughing gently to himself.

"What is the use of your going on in that way?" said the officer. "Fighting monstrous! Pooh! you know as well as all good men do that fighting is as primary a law as loving. Come, now, what about those American experiences of yours, for instance?"

Spencer, who had opened his mouth to let forth a fresh avalanche of theory, paused as if he felt himself taken in flank.

"We are talking about set duels," he said at last.

"Well," said Neuberg gravely, "things being as they are, I should much like to know what your philosophy would propose instead. Now, would that gallant youth over there, and I here, be the excellent good friends we are if we had not had our misunderstanding wiped off by a little personal trial of luck—short and sweet, as you are fond of saying? Luck, chance, *alea jacta*? Is not the whole of life, is not love and glory and happiness and all ruled in this world by cast of die? You yourself said it, only the other day. *Vogue la galere*! What say you, Rochester? I might have had my head cloven had it not been for the lucky panelling behind it, but I have the pleasure of your company instead—good luck! You will have your stitches removed by a philosopher; you have had Eva's nursing—a good throw of dice, admit?"

Spencer could not help smiling before this all-human, all-young argument. He shook his finger in mock despair at Neuberg, and then changed the subject.

"Ah," said he. "Eva! And how is that pretty child? and how stand your hopes and shares in that quarter to-day?"

The officer had risen, and was pacing the room.

"Poor Beau-Sourire——" he began; but suddenly Spencer got up also, and raised his hand.

"Hush!" he said, with an anxious look, and put his finger to his lips. At the same instant there came from the inner room a drowsy little wail, plaintive and pitiable to hear.

"There!" he went on reproachfully, putting down his pipe, and hurrying to his bedroom. With the opening door the cries broke clear upon their hearing.

"A cat—a puppy!" cried Neuberg, dashing after him. Then, with a yell: "Lord in Heaven, an infant!"

"There, there," said the Philosopher in cooing tones; "bring me the lamp, Gustaf. See, poor little one, it has not even a shirt to its back! Do you mind not smoking for a while? I shall have to walk it to sleep. This blanket is harsh to the tender skin; we will provide better to-morrow."

Dexterously dandling a shapeless bundle the tall figure marched once more into Rochester's line of vision. Neuberg followed, bearing the lamp, which showed his countenance distorted by staring amazement.

Spencer's face, on the other hand, as he bent over his charge, betrayed nothing but infinite pity and benevolence.

"See," said he, and shifted the fold of the blanket to expose a wizened, crumpled, pink face, no larger than a boy's fist—"see the mystery of life, not three hours old, yet craving and striving already! This night," he added, "I have seen death and birth."

The infant wailed again, opening a cavernous

mouth, at which Rochester, who had approached to gaze with Neuberg, drew back disgusted.

"Lord," said he, "how ugly the thing is!"

"It is an unusually fine child," said Spencer rebukingly, while he hushed and soothed the small piece of mortality with an expert, tender hand. "By the time that lusty youth will be a thing of the past for us all, this wailing babe may be as fair a woman as the Eva about whom you wise young men fought. This small citizen of the world comes into it with as many rights as you have, and just now it demands to be fed. Gustaf, look here, watch those sucking lips; that is Instinct—instinct is all the human animal need display at first. To think that a soul should lie in this envelope! to think that men, whom God has given such an awful power, should so misuse it, should dare create new lives—give birth and pass their way, and never look back—cast their flesh and blood upon the world, heedless whether it be only to draw one breath and die, or to live on to suffer, and curse the unknown progenitor!"

"But, madman," cried Neuberg, at last bursting into speech, "how come you . . . with a child? Was there no woman to whom you could have given it? Spencer! Spencer! even the wisest may have fallen into folly some time, but is it not likely that you have been imposed upon?"

Spencer raised his face to look in his turn with great surprise at his friend. Then, at sight of the desperate doubt heralded in his whole appearance, in his startling eyes and bristling hair:

"Mercy!" cried he, in the tone of a man who in

very testiness makes a wilfully absurd accusation ;
“ the fellow thinks it is mine ! ”

Instantly Neuberg's brow cleared as if by magic. Throwing himself back into his chair, he fell to laughing to himself—at first gently, then aloud and boisterously.

Spencer held him for a second or two under a severe eye, with no other effect than to increase the merriment. Presently he himself gave way to the infection, and laughed a little, but grudgingly.

The Duke sat and stared at them both, and thought they had taken leave of their senses ; he rubbed his eyes and wondered if he were not in a fantastic dream. His host's attention, however, was soon restored perforce to the infant. He began to collect sundry little household utensils ; measured hot water from the singing kettle into a china cup ; then milk from the jug ; and sugar ; and tasted, and added again.

Meanwhile Neuberg, with spurred feet extended straight before him, with legs like an open compass, lay back, his head against the rim of his chair, and laughed till the room shook.

“ Oh, Spencer,” cried he, with the tears running down his cheeks, “ you will be the death of me ! ”

“ I will tell you one thing,” said Mr. Spencer, placing a spoon in the cup, and carrying it over to the table : “ a man who would thus cast a life into the world, in what you would call a moment of folly, Master Gustaf, and what I call crime, would be the last to do what I am doing now. I have seen to-night, as I said,” he went on, with a yet graver note,

"Death as well as Birth—double mystery. This poor waif is the pivot of the adventure that kept me from going to you. But stay ; until this delicate operation is finished you will have to wait. Where Nature fails," added Michael Spencer, deftly tucking his handkerchief under the little chin, and then tilting the infant to a convenient angle, while he proceeded to insert the half-filled spoon into the wailing mouth—"where Nature fails, we must needs then have recourse to Art. Ah, the poor innocent ; it knows no better, and therefore accepts what it gets ! There the philosophy of life begins."

The three heads bent eagerly over the unconscious infant philosopher. There was a moment's breathless suspense, presently broken by a gentle smacking sound. The three men looked at each other, much relieved, and smiled.

* * * * *

There came along the quiet quay below a noise of hurrying hoofs and wheels, which grew louder, and presently stopped beneath their very windows. The next instant a shrill yell pealed through the empty house.

"My God !" cried Neuberg, with all the lover's prescience, and smote his forehead, "here comes Eva, I'll be bound !"

CHAPTER XVI.

"Eva, probably," said the Philosopher, without raising his head. "I sent Mark to explain why I could not come. Heaven knows," added he, chuckling to himself, "what the fellow may have told her, for I had little thought to spare for explanations just then."

Spencer chuckled again, but Neuberg had grown preternaturally dark.

"I will send her away," he said. "There goes the bell again; it is Eva. Eva does not like waiting."

"Send her away?" said Spencer. "Aye, by all means, if you can. But if she insists upon coming in, tell her that I shall be delighted to see her."

"Spencer!" said Neuberg, and stamped his foot, "do you know how late it is? She is alone in this town; it is the very first night of her arrival. Is it not hard enough for a woman in her position to avoid scandal?"

"My friend," said Spencer, with the same immovable placidity, "I quite agree with you; nevertheless, if I know Eva, she is not the person to be kept out where she wishes to come in. *There!* pray go down, like a good fellow; she will break my bell."

Neuberg bolted out of the room, and was heard clattering down the stone stairs.

"He is perfectly right," said Spencer then, turning to the bewildered Duke with a sweet smile. "This is a world of makeshifts, and, however absurd its trammels may be to us individually, it is each man's duty to respect the conventions of society. Yes, one must respect the conventions," pursued the Philosopher cheerfully, dandling his foundling as he spoke; "but as Eva is not likely to do so to-night, or ever, would you, like a good fellow, put another log or two on the stove, and just push that armchair near to it? We must get this fair lady a cup of tea."

Ascending steps were now audible without, the rustle of a silk gown, and the click of spurs; and Eva's voice, raised and plaintive, echoed hollowly up to them, Neuberg seemed to speak soothingly, but with little effect.

"Tell me nothing," she was heard crying as she reached the landing; "you men are all alike. (Is this the way? Oh, I see, I see!) What are we poor women to do? We set a man upon a pedestal and think ourselves not worthy to kiss his feet, and one fine day, behold! the god is but common clay after all!"

The door swung back and Eva stood before them, flushed tears brimming in her eyes, her lip trembling.

"Ah, Spencer," said she, "what a meeting!"

Spencer turned to her, shifted his bundle over his shoulder in the knowing way that nurses prac-

tise, and, coming forward, bowed with a courtly grace and raised the singer's inert hand to his lips.

"Come, come," said he, "what is the matter with you? This is an excellent meeting of four good friends. Shall this poor innocent spoil it?"

Eva impatiently dashed the tears from her eyes, and gave a long earnest look at the speaker. He bore it unmoved, smiling back at her and still dandling the blanket with a sublime unconsciousness of absurdity.

"Here," said she suddenly, "give me that child! Your servant is a fool, Spencer, and I'm a fool too."

"Aye," said Spencer, "take it, take it! I love to see a woman hold a child."

She gathered the bundle to her arms with the inimitable mother-gesture, and pressed it to her virgin bosom, which still heaved like the sea-waves over which the storm has passed.

"Poor little fright!" she said, and looked down at it. She caught from under her long lashes the tender admiration of Spencer's gaze, and, half with the actress's, half the woman's instinct, held it and hushed it, and fell to pacing the floor singing below her breath an old plaintive lullaby, and smiling at Spencer over her shoulder as she passed.

The three men watched her, each affected in his own manner and degree by the charm of that most exquisite picture, as old as love in the world and as eternally new to every man's heart—the woman and the child.

Neuberg's eye was furtive and dark with conflicting passions; Rochester's wistful as that of one who

dimly perceives some elusive vision of beauty. But Spencer's full glance was bright with ample understanding, complete satisfaction.

"It sleeps already," said Eva. "Fie! the poor ugly little worm! Where did you pick that up, Spencer? And, amongst your eccentricities, do you propose to start an orphan asylum? If so, you may engage me as a matron," she added as an afterthought.

She took her seat in the leather armchair and let the sleeping infant lie upon her knee.

"Alas!" said Spencer, "it is a very common story and a shame to humanity that it should be so common. As I was strolling by the riverside this evening, watching my sunset fade, and thinking to myself what a beautiful world this was, all said and done, I heard a moaning near me. It came from a shed, deserted at night, where the bargemen keep their sacks. I went in, groping, thinking to find some hurt dog, but found—a human being. 'Oh, the cry did knock against my very heart!' I laid my hand on rough long hair, and knew it was a woman. She was past all speech. I felt, though I could not see, that she was in extremity. I ran out, cursing the darkness which might cost a human life, spied a lantern at the landing-port, tore it down—illegal act for which I shall no doubt be fined to-morrow—and flew back to my shed. There I saw that there was not only one life at stake, but two; and it needed not my doctor's experience to make me aware that, though I might save the one, the other was beyond all human aid. The poor creature,

a young thing, too young for maternity at all—much less for such maternity as this, which drove her like an animal into the first deserted hole to battle through her agony alone—it was best for her ! She seemed of the better class, poor wench ! and had fought her battle against shame with a pluck that cost her her life, whilst he—the man—some gallant young buck, no doubt—— Well, I saved the child, at least. When she—the mother—heard it cry, she just found strength to turn her languid head. You have seen, all of you, how the dumb mother, cat or dog, looks when you take up her little one. Such a look had she, and yet a different one ; for the whole human soul spoke in that poor eye. I took her hand in mine ; it was Death's already. 'Whoever you are,' said I, 'your child shall be kindly cared for.' She stared at me for a few seconds. Her hand closed on mine slowly, and then I said again : 'Rest, poor child ; your God will surely be less hard on you than man has been.' I think she died then, but I knelt beside her, and held her hand some time longer, that, as far as possible, she might feel some human fellowship upon the awful loneliness of her passage."

The Philosopher, his face kindled to leonine anger, fell to pacing the room.

Eva turned her head away, that her tears might not fall upon the cheek of the child.

"Was there ever such a man ?" said Neuberg, beaming round upon his friend. "And he goes and brings that babe here to his rooms, as if it were the most natural thing in the world."

"But, come," said the Philosopher, "what else could be done? I do not know anyone yet to whom I could entrust it. I shall look for an honest mother to-morrow who will allow the waif to share for a while the kingdom of some lawful young prince. Meanwhile the creature wants but little."

"And is the poor young mother lying dead out in the cold near the river?" asked Eva, with a shudder; and, as she spoke, she caught the warm living thing to her, lifted the little curling hand to her lips and kissed it. "Poor thing! poor thing!" she said, "and did I say it was an ugly little worm? Heaven forgive me!"

"Yes," said the Philosopher, resuming his tramp and his gravity, after a moment's smiling contemplation—"yes, the dead clay lies out there. But what of that? Would it lie softer under a Queen's catafalque? Poor daughter of Eve," he said; "she paid dearly for the brief pleasure of plucking her apple! Yes, she lies there, unless they have removed her. I ordered that clown of mine to give information to the authorities that be. I have heard," he went on, after a musing pause, "young men boast of such 'conquests.' I have also seen an Indian brave with the bloody scalps of a woman's long fair hair and a child's curls hanging from his belt. Him, at least, I could shoot down, and did!" His eye fell upon the Duke's awestruck countenance as he spoke, and, with a sudden change of tone, "That boy looks tired, Neuberg," he said; "take him home, and let him sleep."

Eva rose.

"I must go, too," she said; "but, by your leave, I will take this thing home with me. It comes, at least, more natural to a woman to have the care of such little plagues."

But here Neuberg bounded forward with uplifted forbidding hand.

"Ah, no, this at least passes all bounds! Eva, have you finally taken leave of your senses?"

Spencer slightly bent towards her, gathered the child back to his arms, and, with a smile and a nod, disappeared with it into the next room. It was like a prince dismissing his circle. He came back in a moment and assisted Eva with her furs.

"You had not even a cup of tea," he said; "I fear I am but a churlish host."

"You gave me better," she replied, her dove eyes very sweet and her voice thrilling with a deep chord.

"As for you," continued Spencer, laying his hand for a moment on the Duke's pulse—"you will be feverish to-night. Give him hot lemonade, Gustaf. If lemons cost but a guinea apiece, how men would value them! Good-night to you all."

* * * * *

Neuberg folded Eva into her carriage with a sort of tender disapproval. Her last look was for the Duke's young face, pale in the light of the coach-lamps.

"If you let him get fever, Neuberg," she said, "I will come and nurse him again; so now you are warned!"

"It is no use," said the Guardsman, when the wheezing hackney-coach had borne her away into

the darkness—"it is no use; it will never be anything better than friendship, and friendship between man and woman is a damned and hollow mockery."

He took his companion by the elbow, and moved forward with him. Rochester halted a moment before turning from the quay, and looked back at the lighted window in the gable.

"What do you say?" asked Neuberg.

"Oh," said the young Englishman, rousing himself from an abstraction, "I did but repeat a line of yours which hangs in my memory:

"'So shines a good deed in a naughty world.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE bloom of early day lay yet unbrushed upon the world as Neuberg, whistling softly to himself, emerged from his house, and, setting his face for the old town, clanked gaily through the awakening streets on his way again to Spencer's rooms.

He looked as pink, as fresh, and as gay as the spring morning itself; the joy of the youth of the year and of the day seemed to have got into his blood. The world seemed to lie before him for the treading of his feet, and the heavens above so near him that he need only reach up his arm to pluck from them his own particular unattainable star.

Like the purple down upon the grape, delicate mists hung over the distance; in the square garden the jewelled dew lay thick on grass and leaf; the air was tremulous with bells that rang from spires scintillating like gems in the vague blue, calling the devout to prayer, the scholar to his desk, the toiler to the yoke of the curse that has become the blessing of men.

The river ran molten copper from east to west. Over the jutting balcony Spencer's windows were flung wide open to the breeze and to the light.

"What a man!" said Neuberg. "However early

I may be, he is always earlier. I wonder," he thought, and laughed aloud as he sprang up the stone stairs, two at a time, past the old grain-laden rooms now open and beginning to hum with life, "what sort of a night, poor fellow, he has had!"

The full note of his friend's voice, raised in didactic cadence, reached him through the open door, as he paused to draw breath on the third flight.

He looked in and laughed again. The Philosopher in his shirt-sleeves, with a boot over one hand and a blacking-brush in the other, stood vigorously applying the one to the other. He bent an earnest countenance to the work, and the while spoke impressively but kindly to the bullet-headed, thickset clown, who, sitting on a straw-bottomed chair, watched his master's proceedings with a sly grin.

As Neuberg listened and, unobserved himself, observed, his smiling lips contracted and his eye grew stern.

"Of course you may say to yourself," Spencer was explaining, "that a little less or a little more shine on a pair of boots is but a trivial matter. But you must remember that to put a shine upon those boots is your Duty—as much your duty, in your path of life, my good fellow, as it is the sentry's duty to keep the best watch, or the King's to give his best thoughts to his people's welfare. Thus, there are no trivial duties. And so each of us must serve our master to our best endeavour, that each may help in our degree, to the good order of the whole. You understand me, Mark, do you not?"

"Yes, sir," said Mark; and his grin broadened.

Neuberg clenched his hand.

"Even then, in the polishing of a pair of boots," proceeded Spencer, after pausing an instant to put a small fresh dab of blacking on the toe, "a man may reach to the highest dignity of manhood—the dignity of work well done. For, mark you, there is a right and a wrong way of working. You have only got to compare that boot, which you would have been content to let your master put on, to this one"—surveying the now shining leather, with head on one side. "But, of course, the first thing is to learn how to set about it. No one can read who has not learnt his letters. You have been watching me, I hope?"

Here the Professor's eye fell a little doubtfully upon his servant's unintelligent visage.

"Yes, sir," said Mark, without budging from his seat, or making any attempt to stifle the yawn that overtook him.

Immediately something terrible sprang at him from behind with ferocious leap—something that clanked and stamped and flashed blue and silver. He was clutched unkindly by the nape of the neck, shaken till his teeth rattled, propped up only to present an unprotected surface to an unmerciful knee, propelled through space, dashed into jarring collision with the floor of the passage, and pelted by an avalanche of imperfectly polished boots—boots that were hailed upon him, it seemed, with a diabolical knowledge of the tenderest corners of his anatomy.

"Cattle!" thundered a voice from above.

Apparently Mark had already recognised the hand, the knee, and the tone, for, without venturing to look up, he rubbed his bumps, and whimpered :

"Ow, ow, ow ! Herr Rittmeister !"

Here he dodged the blacking-brush.

"Look here, swine-hound : polish all those boots as you know how—and sharp . . . or I shall try the effect of a little more rubbing up of your wits ! Understand ?"

"Good heavens, Gustaf ! . . . Gustaf ! mad-man !"

Spencer, half-indignant at this indignity offered to manhood, yet unable to repress his laughter, flung his arms round his friend, and drew him, still foaming at the mouth, into the room again.

"And to think," said Neuberg, with a stamp and an oath, "that I gave you my own fellow, to make sure that you should be well served !"

"My good Gustaf, these are your soldier's ways. Mark is a good fellow at main, but he is a little stupid. One must have patience, and—what the devil ! we must all be taught."

"Taught !" echoed Neuberg, with his stentorian laugh. "Teach a Rider-Guard how to polish a boot ! My poor friend, with your philosopher's ways, you will have always to polish your own boots in this world, I fear, and pay another man for looking on with his tongue in his cheek. Listen to him—just listen to that !"

From the landing without a sound like the mighty rush of an autumn wind through forest-trees fell rhythmically upon their ears.

"If those boots are not red-hot in five minutes, and shining enough to reflect the scamp's own ugly phiz, I'll know the reason why," added Neuberg vindictively.

Spencer's countenance suddenly altered from its expression of genial indulgence. He went to the door, bent his ear to listen for another moment, then he burst out upon the landing with as much violence as the captain himself had displayed but a few moments before.

With one boot before him already shining with unsurpassable lustre, Mark was at work upon another with such energy as not even to perceive his master's tempestuous advent.

"So," cried the Philosopher, his voice ringing between extremes of sorrow and wrath—"so, Mark, I have found you out, have I?"

"What!" roared Neuberg; "is he not working after all?"

"He is, he is," said Spencer; "and that is just it! Neuberg, you don't know all I have done for this fellow. Ignorance one excuses, forgetfulness one forgives, incompetency one tolerates, but bad will, bad will," cried the Philosopher, his voice rising, "to a master like me, is a crime! Infinitely better to wait upon myself all the rest of my life than to harbour such a cur. Go, pack your trunk, sir!"

Mark looked up, bewildered, at his master, then back at the boot he was holding, and, conscious that for the first time in his new service he merited praise and not blame, cried with a loud aggrieved

sniff that he could not do the boots any better, not if it were for His Majesty himself.

"Silence, knave!" cried Neuberg, interrupting Spencer, as the latter opened his mouth for another burst of wounded feelings; "no more of your pranks here if you wish Mr. Spencer to forgive you. And mind you, I have my eye upon you."

It was now his turn to drag his friend back into the room.

"Come, come, Spencer dear," said he, relapsing into English; "we know that the rogue is an honest rogue, so be content. He is as good as you will ever have, with your incorrigible theory that all men have souls."

"If the fellow loved me," began Spencer, "he would have tried to please me."

"Pooh!" said Neuberg, balancing his foot with unconscious significance; "loved you, you innocent! He will try to please you in future, if I mistake not, because he knows the weight of my displeasure."

Here he burst out laughing, and, after a slight hesitation, the Philosopher joined in the merriment.

"Good heavens!" cried Neuberg, suddenly growing very serious; "I forgot. What have you done with the little worm?"

Spencer's face became illumined as with pleasant recollections.

"She slept like a flower," said he, "and at dawn this morning a messenger comes from my baker to say that his poor infant had had convulsions and was dead, and would I come and compose the wife.

Well, there were two good things, Neuberger, for the baker's child, if it had lived, would have been an idiot. I had treated it—it was a hopeless case; and my baker's wife has a strapping, healthy body, and a tender heart. Here were a childless mother and a motherless child; the wails of both were silent when I left them, deeply occupied with each other."

"By the way," said the officer, "that reminds me, have you breakfasted?—for I have not. It is a lovely day; shall we go forth? My duty only begins at nine."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN the thick, heavy white cups the coffee was fragrant ; under their fingers the long roll broke crustily, still steaming from the oven. The charming freshness of the morning, as the Guardsman and the Philosopher sat outside the little café in a streak of sunshine, pale yellow still, gave to their fare that matchless zest which belongs to open-air meals.

The hum of the busy town was already at its height. Determined housewives, followed by bare-armed maids with baskets, hurried past them to the market-place round the corner ; smiling housewives hurried away, discussing their bargains as they went ; squads of soldiers, as untidy in their forage kit as they would be spruce later on in the day, trundling in their hand-cart the day's *menage*, stiffened into salutes as they crossed the shadow of the handsome officer ; ever and anon a belated country waggon high-laden with green food, slowly dragged by slaver-ing, patient-eyed, noiseless-treading oxen, lumbered by with shrieking wheels, or yet a little drove of sheep pattered on upon their last stage but one. Bleatings mixed with the plaintive call of the calf, the expostulations of pig, chicken, or duck, the deep reflective

note of the draught-bullock. And above all rose the human clamour—cries of street vendors, cries of stall-keepers, out-screamings of bargaining wives, whistling, laughter, anger, persuasion; and the jangle of bells far and near—some grave, some gay, some impertinently obtrusive; discordant sounds most of them, and egotistic in their personal insistence, but, taken as a whole, under a bright spring sky, a very symphony of social life.

The Philosopher tilted his green wooden chair and lay back smiling, listening and noting.

"There throbs the heart of the town, taking in and sending forth again the blood of its life," he said.

Neuberg lifted his head from the contemplation of his coffee-grounds with the approving glance he always had ready for his friend's conceits.

"And there lies the brain, I suppose you would say," said he, jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the Royal Palace.

"Fresh flowers . . . fair flowers!"

The call of a woman clove the air not unmusically in the interval of a sudden lull.

"I think," said Neuberg, with a charming little air of consciousness, "that I will take a turn by the flower-stalls."

"By all means," said Spencer placidly. They paid the reckoning for their frugal repast, and, arm in arm, stepped towards the market-place.

As gay and busy to see as to hearken to. Buyers and vendors moving in and out like bees in their hives or ants in their hills; shifting hues of orange and scarlet on peasant heads and bosoms; the flash

of white kerchiefs and aprons ; the gleam of copper and tin and glazed crockery ; the softer tints of roots and fruits beneath great tent-like umbrellas of indigo or faded green. Indescribable odours too floating in the air, each qualifying or chasing the other ; the whiffs of wide open country from hay-lined carts, the pungency of roasted coffee, of stored apples and lemons, of cobblers' stalls, and the abomination of the pork-butcher's booth ; the mixed atmosphere of the hen-coops with their main smell of musty straw. All of which, like discords, resolved themselves, as the two friends halted before the flower-stall, into a sudden and delicious harmony. Here the trestle tables were impurpled with violets, starred with jonquils and primroses. A heap of hyacinths sent forth heavy sweetness from a corner.

A buxom woman, with cheeks as hard and round and rosy as the best preserved apple in her neighbour's hoard, was soon engaged in filling the officer's hands with choice blooms. With grave deliberation he wavered long between the claims of the single narcissus and the single hyacinth, the primrose and the jonquil, and ended by compounding matters and buying of them all. The violets, with their humble mourning hue, their scent lost in the grosser sweetness of their waxen rivals, failed to appeal to him.

Turning round with a jubilant air to show his companion the bunch which it took two hands to hold, he found him, somewhat to his surprise, fingering the little purple bunches with dreamy gaze. The surprise was still greater when the man of

abstractions and science opened his mouth and delivered himself in the following manner: "'O Proserpina!'" cried he,

"'For the flowers now that frightened thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon! Daffodils
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath——'

Oh!" he went on, "what magic inspired that poor play-actor, that he should have known how to sing every man's love and to cry out every man's sorrow?—

"'violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes!'

How much in that little line! Lover, poet, master of hidden music, and, withal, what an observer! You, Gustaf, all enamoured as you are, I will wager that you have never noted the beauty of a beautiful woman's eyelids. Look at these violets—'dim, but sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes.' 'Sweeter!' Ah, there he is a heretic!"

At this point the Philosopher fell into a muse, gazing at the flowers in his hands.

Open-mouthed, with starting eyes, Neuberger stared at him. Spencer sentimental! Spencer with love-lorn look and tongue! What was coming next?

In a moment his friend sighed and spoke again.

"Call back your gentlest memories," said he, "and see how true is the comparison. There is, moving in the ways of the world, someone I know—a thing of fire and air—and when she looks at me—

to borrow once again, if not from the words from the thoughts of the master—when she looks at me, I could wish that she might do no other thing, because of the fathomless wonder of those eyes ; but when they are cast down I can scarce wish them open again, for the sight of lids as delicate as these flowers, as faintly purple—and as sweet (a man dare think) to kiss.”

Saying which, Mr. Spencer absently lifted the posy to his lips, and kept it pressed thereto.

Neuberg's countenance meanwhile was an open field for the conflict of most diverse emotions—incredulity, bewilderment, amazement, impetuous sympathy and devouring curiosity. It was the last that conquered. Nevertheless, he opened his mouth only to close it again upon the unspoken question.

“Elusive,” murmured Mr. Spencer, freeing his lips to speak ; “but swoon sweet. Madam,” said he then, bowing ceremoniously to the stall-woman, “I will take all your violets, if you please, if you will kindly supply me with a basket to place them in and have them sent with this card to the Gräfin Lucena, at the Palace.”

“Oh Cupid, little god of love !” exclaimed Neuberg, and put his flowers down for the express purpose of slapping his thigh exultantly, “now is the murder out !”

Spencer fixed upon him a surprised, displeased glance. Half the market turned to see the sky-blue officer gesticulate, and a score of honest peasant faces grinned in unconscious sympathy with his great “Ha, ha !”

Spencer regarded his friend with ever-increasing severity ; both were charmingly indifferent to popular interest.

" Oh, my dear," cried Neuberg in his fluent translated English, " that I should live to see the day ! The little archer has shot in the gold this time. The Philosopher—the Philosopher in love ! "

" Love ? " echoed Mr. Spencer, and flouted the notion. " Love ?—no ! One beautiful thing suggests another. Mere concatenation of ideas, that is all." Then suddenly his eye dilated, his figure seemed to expand, his cloudy hair stiffen, and in a wave of wrath : " How is it," cried he, " that you, even you, can descend to the odious vulgarity of bantering a man upon a subject which should be so sacred ? If your friend were in love, that would be his own heart-secret, to be kept or confided as he saw fit. Nor should the mere idle supposition be a motive for pointless jests. I cannot endure it ! " he continued, with an ever deeper sense of injury. " As soon as ever a man approaches a woman with admiration, or be it only with courtesy, lo ! he must find himself and her enveloped as in a net of meaning observation and insinuation, each simplest action marked by nods and becks and wreathed smiles. Be it envy, be it malice, be it mere idle fooling, it is always ill-bred, sometimes desecration, and the results are frequently pernicious in the extreme. Love," went on Mr. Spencer, " is the passion we share with the angel or with the beast. It is the highest and most beautiful of all human emotions, or the most degraded. At whichever extreme you

take it, it is a thing terrible, potent for good or evil. But to play with it, laugh at it, jest upon it, can the folly of fools go further? "

The Guardsman shook himself like a dog under the pelting shower of words; for a moment he flushed hotly, and seemed about to spring a violent retort, but on second thought his face cleared, and he broke into a smile again.

"How is it possible," he made rejoinder, "that when it is open to you to bask in the beams of my Eva's eyes, you can talk of living for ever under the gaze of the Lucena's? Brr! they frighten me, those eyes of the Gräfin: I never know what thought lies behind them. Ah, give me Eva—the warm, the tangible, the human, the laughing Eva Beau-Sourire! Oh, Michael, prate about your lady's lids! Have you never noted Beau-Sourire's lips?—there is not such another pair in all the world. What are violets to deep-red roses, to sweet-breathed carnations, pouting, bursting asunder? And to think," he added with a cry, "that I have never had a kiss of love from them yet!"

He fell into a kind of passionate muse; while Spencer, shrugging his shoulders, turned from him, and began with simple awkward fingers gravely to rearrange the violets in the basket.

"I believe," cried Neuberg, struck by a brilliant idea, and gathering up his flowers again feverishly as he spoke, "that I will just take them round to Eva myself."

"No such thing," said Spencer, now once again his benign and placid self. "Have you so little

consideration, young man, for that poor girl's reputation in a foreign town? Wait till the hour grows more conventional. Come, send your flowers, and let us to the stables. 'Tis the right moment for a gallop."

"Convention? This comes well from you, indeed!" protested Neuberg, scornful but yielding.

His friend took him firmly under the arm, and thus the two strolled away as they had come. The Philosopher was now sweeter than nuts, in humour and choice of words; he spoke of Love as they went, till the listener felt his heart swell within him, and thought he had never known before how dearly he cherished the mistress of his choice.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE Duke rubbed his eyes. So rapidly had new impressions succeeded each other during the last four days, and so confusedly did the memory of them throng into his mind, that, roused suddenly from deep sleep, he could not recall where he was.

Neuberg opened the window wide, unfastened and flung back the outer green shutter; and floods of blue air, the very breath of the spring, burst into the room, to the accompaniment of some distant drum, strident as a cricket's beat and threaded with an acid string of fife.

"Hark!" said Neuberg, "there goes the main watch, which means, my friend, that it is the burning hour of noon, and that therefore you have slept the clock round. Spencer swears by lemons, rind and juice!"

He came over to the foot of the bed, and sat on the edge, swinging his high-booted leg. "Did you sweat?" said he, and inserted his cool fingers under the collar of the half-awakened youth. "Splendid! There, then, you may get up, so Spencer said; which," he added, "is lucky, as the King wants to see you. Hans shall get you a hot bath and rub you

down like a horse, and you will be as fit as a fiddle. Meanwhile cover up, and I shall tell you the morning news. Why, half my day is done."

Rochester yawned and smiled, looking preposterously young with the red curls tossed about the beardless face. This wakening to his new existence was a joy; the concrete part of it represented by Neuberg's breezy presence, radiating the joy of life and the lustiness of manhood, delightful to one accustomed to be aroused from obstinate slumber by an abominable Smiley.

"It is a glorious day," said the Count; "I have had a glorious morning. Up at sunrise, I strolled to Spencer's house. He had been up since dawn."

"I do not wonder," said the Duke, recalling one by one the experiences of the previous evening. Reviewed by morning wits, they had lost their glamour, and showed out shabby and uncouth to his young fastidious mind. He felt astonished, even a little ashamed, of the enthusiasm which had actually possessed him for this eccentric countryman. "I do not wonder," he said; "if your philosopher sets up as dry-nurse to foundlings, he must expect to have a troubled rest."

"Dear fellow!" said Neuberg, with a tender laugh of recollection; "nay, he swears the bantling slept like a flower. Before I came he had found a nest for it, so he is already out of that. Was I not right to say, 'Never was such a man'?"

"Oh, I for one will not dispute it," said the Duke, with the suspicion of a sneer.

"Well, you would have thought so even more

strongly this morning," said Neuberg, his eye too inwardly fixed upon his own thoughts to notice Rochester's expression. "We had breakfast together, you must know, and after breakfast we went to the market-place, for I wanted to buy a bunch of spring flowers as a morning greeting for a certain lady. Ah, Mr. Postilion!" cried he then, with a loud laugh, "did I steal a march upon you? There is a virtue, after all, in early rising. Well, thereby, as the saw runs, 'hangs a tale.'" The speaker paused and measured Rochester with a thoughtful eye. "Nay," he went on, after a while, "since strangely we have grown friends, I will have no secrets from you; for I understand friendship is but one way—the heart on the hand. Spencer likes you, too; he told me so this morning. He has read you like a book. 'A lad of delicate honour,' he says, 'with the making in him, if well guided, of a fine man.' We shall be three in the bond. Give me thine hand upon it, mine honest rival!"

Moved by a curious mixture of feelings, the blood rose in Rochester's face as he slid his hand into his host's grasp. Gladdened to the innermost by the words of praise, his vanity, nevertheless, rebelled against the original source of it.

"D—— his impertinence!" he thought, but at the same moment smiled, in spite of himself, with eyes and lips.

"That being settled," said Neuberg, with a sigh of satisfaction, "I shall tell you about Spencer." He lowered his voice, and proceeded with a mouth-ing whisper: "Spencer is in love, too."

He stood back and stared at the Duke to see the effect of this astonishing revelation. But the other only stared back rather blankly.

"In love," he echoed—"in love after all—and with Eva, I suppose?"

"God forbid!" cried the Count. "No, no! Heaven is good to me. No, it is with the Countess Lucena."

"And who is she?" asked the boy, his fancy vibrating to the sound of the romantic name.

"Ah, who indeed?" cried Neuberg. "And have you been four days in my company, and never heard me speak of the Countess Lucena? And have you been a night in this town and no rumour of her yet reached your ear? She is the pearl of our Court, Duke. Never look so astonished, man; I am not in love with her. She is too subtle—refined, too art-learned, too idealised, too high-strung, too everything altogether beyond your humble servant! I told you, did I not," he added, after a pause, "that if Spencer ever fell a victim, it would be to some wonderful being, half goddess, half *grande dame*. Strange I should not have thought of her then. But she has been so much away, I hardly knew they had met. Goddess, she might best pass for Diana—in looks, at least. (They were curious beings, your goddesses, if we examine their private lives.) Eva would make a better Venus, and yet, if an unbiassed Paris had to choose, it is as like as not he would give the apple to the Lucena. . . . Well, we are not Paris, nor are we unbiassed. She is *grande dame*, if you like; there can be but one opinion about that—Eng-

lish, too. You English must be a remarkable people to produce a Spencer and a Lucena. Oh, I crave pardon—also the pink and pattern of postilions ! ”

To anyone else the Duke might have shown pique upon such disrespectful banter, but there was a loveliness about Neuberg that coloured even his most familiar speech.

“ Oh, go on ! ” said the new peer, and kicked the bedclothes in the schoolboy way that occasionally overcame his gracious dignity. “ How comes a countrywoman of mine in a foreign Court and with a foreign name ? ”

“ Marry, sir,” said Neuberg, with his occasional Elizabethan twist of tongue, “ the explanation need not tax your wits greatly to follow. The beauteous Julia (her name is Julia) is the daughter of some whilom British Ambassador at the Tuscan Court, Anglo-Saxon from sire and dam, but bred a Florentine. Married, if not, like Julia Capulet, at fourteen, at least at some absurdly tender age, to one Count Lucena, a jealous Spanish Neapolitan, she was early and mercifully widowed of the same. Since then ” —Neuberg spread out the fingers of one hand with an expressive gesture—“ since then : five years’ widowhood at Florence. She is devoted to art and study, and the cult of Beauty generally. Florence, some people say, offers a variety of distractions to a young and lovely woman. However, let that pass : rumour is always ill-natured. She became the bosom friend and confidante of our Queen (who was, as you know, or probably don’t, a Princess of the House of Tuscany, and is virtue itself, so that even rumour

dare not puff at her), and followed Her Majesty hither three years ago. The Queen is devotedly attached to her, allows her every liberty—nay, is led by her without so seeming—loads her with favours, which are so graciously accepted that one would swear the obligation was on Her Majesty's side. And here you have the map of the country."

"Does Mr. Spencer," asked Rochester, "admit the soft impeachment?"

Neuberg chuckled.

"Of course," he said, "I attacked him presently. To find Spencer a prey to the ordinary weakness of mankind was too delightful, and the dear fellow is so unconscious of his real state, and so guilelessly wise over other people's follies, so sure of his own immunity—and all the while so hopelessly entrapped! It will be a most instructive lesson to him, and, my faith! she will make it a pleasant one. He could not have fallen into better or safer hands, nor more practised. She will lift him up to heights Elysian . . . and let him down gently when she has had enough. It is just the one experience he wanted to make him a perfect man. He is in deadly earnest already. . . . I got a tremendous rating for my vulgarity in laughing at so sacred a subject."

"And do you let him rate you, Count Neuberg?" asked Rochester.

His friend gave him a sudden, surprised stare, then laughed.

"Let him rate me?" said he. "I have to let him if he wants to. Oh, you do not know Spencer yet; but allow me to tell you he would not rate one

did he not think one worth the trouble. You will perhaps notice him with some at the Court—fools as they are many, snakes as they are a few—and his manner to them: two words of suavity, covering contempt. So I just let Spencer have at me when he has a mind, and am flattered that he should care. Moreover, he generally says something worth remembering on those occasions. And, besides, I have good example. You should have heard him giving scold number three to-day (row the first was with his servant), and to whom addressed do you think?—to the King!”

Neuberg threw himself back with one of his merry laughs. Rochester gazed open-mouthed: he had an innate respect for rank, beginning with his own, and could hardly conceive the situation.

“I do not think,” said Neuberg, sitting up again, and rubbing his nose reflectively—“I do not think His Majesty quite liked it, between ourselves. But he, all shining star of the Holy Alliance as he is, must, like his humbler fellow-men, take Spencer as he finds him. Well, I will tell you how it came about. We took our ride together, Spencer and I, and my dear fellow was delicious. We spoke of love under the budding chestnuts. It is a morning I never can forget; and since I know that Michael Spencer, too, has fallen into the snare, my heart sings like a bird’s. I cannot help it; it makes my way so much clearer. Poor Eva, though, it will be a bitter blow to her! I declare I am a selfish wretch, always thinking about her, and yet not for her.”

He fell into a sudden silence.

Rochester watched him a little while striving to follow his friend's complicated thoughts ; but seeing the musing likely to be prolonged he grew impatient.

"What about the King and the scolding ?"

"Oh," said Neuberg, starting, and falling in his easy way back to his former matter, "that was a sight! I wish you had been there. It was upon the subject of horses, too, which is for the moment one of His Majesty's favourite studies. He is just now having a splendid young blood-mare broken in for him under the supervision of Herr von Sachs—a Prussian beast, Rochester, and, by-the-by, one of those Court serpents about whom I was speaking to you. This Sachs has a rough-rider—another Prussian beast—whom he swears by. We found them all in the stable-yard—my Royal master, Sachs, the rough-rider, and the mare. And the mare was making as firm a protest as she could, poor creature, against the treatment. I don't know how you manage these things in England, but to see Sachs' precious system applied—well, it is not a pretty sight. The trainer's boots were blood up to the calf, and the mare's mouth ran blood and foam. 'Good God, your Majesty!' said Spencer, 'what have you here?' My mind misgave me; I wished I could spirit him away, and I gave him a sharp nudge to make him hold his tongue.

"'Oh,' says the King, 'an incurably obstinate and vicious animal, I am afraid, for, according to Sachs' report here, none but his man will ever be able to manage her. More is the pity, for she is the pick of the stud.'

“ ‘Obstinate?’ says Spencer (‘Neuberg, leave me alone!’—and I gave it up)—‘vicious? No, not if I am a judge of physiognomy. Tortured, sir!’

“ ‘Physiognomy in a horse,’ says the King; ‘oh, these philosophers!’ And he laughs very loud. As for Sachs, he went green. ‘Perhaps,’ says he, ‘Mr. Spencer would give us a practical exposition of his theories.’ Spencer notices him no more than if he had been a fly buzzing in his ear. ‘Look at that eye, your Majesty,’ continues he; ‘how can you bear that reproach? Why, it is almost human in its agony.’ ‘My good friend,’ says the King very dryly, ‘this is quite out of your department. It is necessary that man should conquer if he is to make a servant of his steed.’

“ ‘With all respect, sir,’ answers Spencer, ‘have a servant—not a slave. The horse, a noble and refined animal, demands intelligent and courteous treatment. At this rate, when that beautiful creature is considered fit for your Majesty’s saddle, she will not be worth the bestriding.’ His Majesty stiffened himself, and I think was about to give his shoulder to Spencer, when Sachs, quite unable to contain his fury, broke in, positively stammering.

“ ‘Mr. Spencer,’ says he, ‘thinks perhaps it is as easy to handle the reins as to dandle a baby—to sit in that saddle as to loll in a rocking-chair’ The infernal ass! he thought this was the most deadly stab. But my dear Michael’s simplicity is as polished and impervious as a cuirass——”

“ ‘But how the deuce,’ interrupted Rochester, whose interest in his countryman was unconsciously

reviving—"how could this Herr Sachs know about the baby already?"

"My dear fellow, it is the joke of the Court. There is not an extra breath we take the King does not know of within twelve hours at most. He would sooner go without his breakfast than without his police report every morning, and anything out of the way is the topic of the day. Our police here is managed, I assure you, within a nail's breadth of perfection. His Majesty knows all about our little encounter, too, of course; I told you he would. He pretends he does not; and that, by the way, explains his forestalling my request for leave to present you. You are a hero here already."

But the Duke did not seem altogether pleased with the efficiency of the King's police.

"It is fortunate that Spencer does not care a farthing for what people say of him," proceeded Neuberg. "Well, the King laughed again at Sachs' sally. 'Ah, yes,' said he; 'we have heard of this, Mr. Spencer. It was daring, upon my soul! I myself should prefer to tackle that young blood yonder.' Here, of course, everyone was vastly tickled, except Michael, who remained as grave as a mustard-pot. 'It would be curious, after all,' said the King, 'to see if you would be as ready to preach from the saddle as from the chair.' I knew he was really vexed with Spencer under his urbane manner, and wanted to put him down. Of course none of them dreamt of a philosopher accepting such a challenge. But Spencer was the very image of unsuspecting dignity, nor would he let them

off one tittle of his opinion. 'Sire,' said he, 'although a man may quite legitimately criticise a performance without even being able to do as much himself, I am ready, if it please you, to back my opinion by deed. I will undertake to put that animal through all her paces—through all the paces, at least, that are natural to a horse. But I won't undertake to make her dance the mazurka,' he added, looking at Sachs, 'which I don't consider a desirable accomplishment in charger, hack, or hunter.' Sachs, who was now every colour of the rainbow, was all for mounting Spencer then and there. But Spencer declared that the poor brute was so distracted that it would not be a fair trial. Any time, however, in the afternoon that His Majesty was pleased to fix, he said, he would be ready. And so," said Neuberg, rising, "my Philosopher will play the horse-breaker at four o'clock before a select assembly. And you must now get up if you would be there to see, Rochester. I have kept you by my chatter an unconscionable time."

At the door he paused and looked back, grinning.

"You shall see," said he, "that Michael finds it as easy to deal with the rearing of a horse as with the rearing of an infant."

CHAPTER XX.

"No, sir," said Rochester, "merely travelling for pleasure."

"So," said the King, and eyed him kindly.

The young Englishman stood in the charmed circle of Royalty, and though none that beheld him saw aught in his manner but a pretty youthful grace, he was conscious himself of a quickening of the pulses, a sense of awe and constraint, that made him (he thought angrily) show awkward, foreign, and unversed. And he wondered to see the unconcern of Neuberg through all his military precision; the ease of Spencer, whose friendly face he dimly recognised in the distance.

The afternoon had kept the promise of the morning; the sunshine was dazzling bright on the side terrace, whither Neuberg had ushered him into the presence of the Sovereign.

For the first few moments he had received but a confused impression of glistening shoulder-knots, rustling dresses, bright watching eyes, and whispering fair faces—these as a background to a dominant manly figure that stood apart from the rest and measured him with the glance of the Sovereign.

"You are travelling, I understand," said the King graciously, "in the English custom, for the completion of your studies."

And then he had bowed and answered, blushing under the sense of his own harmless disingenuousness.

"So," had said the King; and then added with a smile, holding out his hand, "You are welcome, Duke, to our capital."

This King was a man of parts; he spoke many languages with a conscious ease.

Recognised now according to his rank, the boy felt his spirit rise with a bound; the mists cleared from his eyes, and he looked about him seeingly.

He was surprised to find that his Royal interlocutor was somewhat below middle stature, so imposing had been the first impression, and so imposing did he still appear to calmer observation as the centre of a brilliant circle. This effect was no doubt partly due to the square shoulders and the erect carriage—natural advantages artificially heightened by a becoming uniform and by a cultivated eagle glance. For the rest, the King had a broad, rather low forehead, sinuously crossed by swelling veins, upon which fine dark curling hair grew down in three distinct peaks; a sanguine complexion; prominent light eyes; full lips, very red and smooth, with a shade of that ferocity in their expression which is known to attract a certain type of woman. It was a powerful, manly personality, and made an extraordinary impression of strength and activity—that of a man with full blood and steel nerves,

who helped himself to life with both hands and was marked out as much by temperament as by birth for the autocrat.

A few paces in the rear stood a group of officers, conversing under their breath with each other, but never losing sight of the least movement of their master—cavalrymen, apparently, in the best recognised attitudes of ease and attention; a couple in forest green, one with a crimson-befurred dolman, and, predominant among them in his silver and blue, Neuberg, gay and handsome.

An elderly man, of broad and wiry frame, with long grizzled hussar moustache, stood a little away from the rest, legs straggling apart and fist on hip, flicking the tip of his Hessianians with a cutting whip. This personage Rochester instantly identified as Herr von Sachs, one of his friend's Court serpents.

Under the radiance of the spring sun, the fluttering scarves and light silk dresses of the bevy of ladies gathered against the marble balustrade shone with a pleasant harmony of rose, tender green, and faint lilac. From the deference paid to her, the Duke easily distinguished the black-browed, sweet-eyed Queen. She was smiling over her shoulder at the Philosopher, who, in a close-fitting suit of iron gray, with the shade of his picturesque wide-winged felt upon his face, looked wonderfully at home amid, yet quite as wonderfully apart from, his surroundings.

Little bursts of laughter came rippling over, accompanied by Spencer's own deep and jovial note.

Rochester could hardly forbear casting glances

of longing in that attractive direction, whilst still singled out by the King for particular notice.

"You find us assembled upon a curious occasion, as doubtless Count Neuberg has informed you; your learned countryman and he are inseparable friends—Castor and Pollux, Damon and Pythias! Professor Spencer has, it seems, a theory of his own upon the education of the horse. We have great respect for his capacity on the subject of the education of the human being, and we hope to retain him by our side, were it for no other purpose than to advise us on the many reforms it is our purpose to introduce into that department. For stable discipline, however, we confess that we should have been disposed to address ourselves elsewhere. But he has shown recently such unexpected accomplishments that we are quite prepared to see him demonstrate successfully to-day that the proper way of dealing with the colt is to take him by the polite side of his nature, and say, 'if you please.'"

The King gave, as he spoke, a little dry laugh in which Rochester had no difficulty in recognising the remains of the irritation described by Neuberg that morning.

"I would rather," thought he to himself, "be in His Majesty's good than in his bad books."

"We will hope," pursued the King, "that our Professor may not be too rudely disillusioned, for all our sakes," he added, "not forgetting yours, Duke. I understand that slinged arm is now under his care; it could not be in better hands, I assure you. I trust you are rapidly recovering. It ap-

pears," he pursued, with a laugh, which this time rang more genuine, "that you are also a somewhat reckless horseman." Then, with his eyes fixed upon the boy's hot flushing countenance, he proceeded in tones of slightly malicious banter: "Our ladies are quite anxious to make the acquaintance of 'Love's Postilion,' as one of them has named you. This is a pretty renown to have spread before you!"

He paused for a moment, his prominent eyes still scrutinising the sensitive young face: they were very different from the benevolent eyes which had seemed to read Rochester's soul the night before up in the Philosopher's lofty perch. This inquisitive hard gaze was that of a man whose pride it was never to droop it before another's. It was a gaze which did not read, but violated. Before such a look from an equal a woman might instinctively drop her veil; a man might ball his fist or seek his sword hilt; from a Sovereign, perhaps, it might to certain minds seem to confer honour.

The Englishman's unsettled youthful blood was all in a turmoil. The King's smile grew ever more friendly as he gazed upon the confusion he had caused—confusion so evident, yet endured with such natural high-breeding.

"Come," said he, and laid his hand on the Duke's shoulder, "the Queen is beckoning to us. Your acquaintance is impatiently desired by the fair of our Court, even as we of the sterner sex are all agog to see this lady whose charms seem so potent. Eh, Count Neuberg!"

Side by side they had reached the group of officers,

who fell back before them ; but Neuberg, catching his name and the King's look, advanced to join them.

" We were talking," said the King, " of this *rara avis*, who has the tones of the nightingale and the loveliness of Venus's own dove, and we were saying that we shall be all impatience until we are gratified with the sight of her."

There was a kind of flicker in his gray eye as he spoke, gone as soon as come. The Equerry, Rochester thought, threw back a sudden, startled glance, but that, too, was so momentary that he could hardly be sure. The next moment Neuberg made a laughing rejoinder, and the three approached the Queen.

Rochester was duly presented, and kissed the little ringed hand graciously extended to him. As he straightened himself, nervously conscious of many smiling eyes fixed upon him, he heard a voice floating in the air, as it seemed, above him, so delicate and melodious that it rather grew upon the senses generally than broke upon the ear ; and the voice said in English, with the faintest foreign intonation :

" You never told me he was such a pretty boy."

Looking hastily round, he saw a slight, tall figure, all enveloped in pale lilac folds and diaphanous scarves, a large beplumed hat crowning a cloud of light-brown hair, fine and tremulous as the feathery wood-ash. The small face showed behind the folds of veil as a ray of moonlight behind the mist ; eyes like pools in shadow, gleaming fathomless ; lips of bewildering outline, moving even as he gazed from

gaiety to gravity, curving divinely over flashing teeth, or closing into narrow scarlet like the folded poppy. From the waving feather crest to the hem of the light, floating skirt, everything about this being seemed as vaporous as the spiral mists sucked from the meadows by the kisses of the morning sun.

Then suddenly, feeling himself enveloped in an atmosphere of laughter, the Duke awoke to the fact that he had been betrayed into staring like a bumpkin. Someone, Neuberg or Spencer, now laid hold of him, and continued the introduction.

"I am glad to see you, my countryman," she said, and held out her hand, that through the gray glove felt warm and soft like a living bird.

Her eyes were caressing behind narrowed lids, and her smile was a pit of such sweetness that the Duke fell headlong in upon the spot. When he had sufficiently recovered from the shock to be able to look back upon the place where he had stood a moment before it was as from a great distance.

So this was the Countess de Lucena. He had known it before the name was spoken. And those were Spencer's violets clasped behind the gold at her waist; they seemed to form part of her, as, indeed, did all she wore, and he was ready to swear that the fragrance which was wafted to him was her own, and not that of the flowers.

It was to Spencer she turned again, after a second glance upon the Duke which held him by her side as firmly as if she had put out her hand to retain him. The boy's heart burned with a grudging pain it had

never felt before. Who was this man that he should bar the way with her as well as with Eva? . . . Poor Eva! Here Rochester was smitten with tender, pitying remorse. What chance had she, poor Beau-Sourire, the simple songstress, the unsophisticated child of earth, against the goddess who was also a *grande dame*?

"By George!" thought the Duke. "*Grande dame* first of all!"

Unconsciously, that was what most appealed to the young patrician in the subtle loveliness of his latest discovery; unconsciously, also, the very thought drew a comparison between her and the woman who had been the fire of his soul until a few moments before, and in the comparison there was faint-hearted disparagement.

The circle was now breaking up. Everyone followed the King towards a particular angle of the terrace which dominated a large expanse of hedged-in turf below, a sort of open-air ring or, rather, miniature racecourse.

"Among many other accomplishments," said the Countess de Lucena, turning to Rochester, while Spencer, summoned to the King's side, hastened forward, "His Majesty reckons that of scientific horsemanship, and he is anxious to encourage the breeding of horses and sporting tastes throughout his kingdom generally. We have seen many a pretty display in this spring-garden, but never one so interesting as this promises to be."

She moved onward as she spoke, showing to Rochester, with a vague recollection of his classical

studies, as might a nymph among mortals. More quietly robed than the other women, no taller, less magnificently proportioned than some, with no vivid colouring of hair or cheek, she yet seemed to throw everyone else in shadow. The Queen was ordinary—merely pretty beside her. The very youth of one or two girls lost its spring charm and grew uncouth—immature—by contrast with her perfect grace.

They halted where some seats had been placed for the Royal party. A few yards further a broad flight of marble steps led down to the level of the field below. The Countess remained standing, leaning with her elbow upon the balustrade, her cheek upon her hand; and the Duke stood beside her. After a second or two the King came up to them, and Spencer's gray figure was seen quietly descending the steps. The Countess looked after him in silence, the pupils of her gray eyes contracting intently. Rochester was minded of some beautiful, enigmatical cat watching a distant bird, but immediately repudiated the blasphemous simile.

"I hope," said the King, "that our friend may fall softly; the turf is springy."

"Do you think, your Majesty, there is any danger?" asked the Countess, with a pretty deference in her mien, and a certain little thrill in her voice.

"Danger, gracious lady!" said the King, "do you not know that only the trainer has been able to sit the mare; that not even the great Sachs himself dare try conclusions with her? Ah, here she

comes! See how she sends the turf scudding. Our friend Spencer will hold his life in his hands. You fair ladies can imagine yourselves back in the good old Roman days, looking down upon a game of life and death. Was it not a happy thought of mine to provide you with such an entertainment? I believe," added the King reflectively, "that the Romans thoroughly understood women."

The speaker's glance met for a second that of the lady; both smiled, then she cast down her lids.

"I am afraid, sir," said she, "that I have very little Roman courage about me. I am afraid that I should have sickened in the circus. But your Majesty is jesting, I am sure; our professor's life is too precious to all of us to be lightly risked."

"Well," said the King, still smiling, and glancing across her towards Rochester, who felt a little surprised at the cynical attitude of this enlightened Monarch, "it is not too late to stop him yet"—and he half turned round, as though to call up his Equerry.

"Oh no!" cried the lady, quickly raising her hand.

The King moved away, laughing to himself, while the Countess, turning to the Duke, said in an undertone:

"If I know our countryman, that would be a harder fall for his pride than any he is likely to find on yonder ground."

As she spoke, a slight flush, like a flame within an alabaster lamp, mounted to her face, and the Duke, gazing at her, thought that for the smile of

such a woman a man might gaily go to meet death itself.

By this time the trainer, by spur and whip, had driven his steed to face the stand, and there reined it to a halt. It was an exquisite, satin-skinned creature, but its bright bay coat showed foam-stained and distressed already, its ears were thrown back, its eyeballs starting. The rider glanced up and saluted, then sat motionless like a bronze statue with unrelaxing hand and mien.

"What an ugly brute the fellow is!" said Rochester, unpleasantly struck by the fleshy, lowering countenance.

"Say, rather, what a magnificent animal!" said the Countess. "See, he sits that fretting steed as though he were one with it. His Majesty spoke of the Roman games; I wonder if I should really have liked them? What a gladiator this man might have been!" she added musingly.

She disengaged a dainty eyeglass mounted on a long handle, delicately chased and gemmed, and lifted it to her eyes. "One can count the muscles of his thigh," she remarked. "Ah! Spencer approaches. He is holding spurs—no, a bit, I declare! Heavens! how handsome he looks, and what a contrast!"

The watchers above now saw, rather than heard, the Englishman exchange a few words with the trainer, upon which the latter suddenly dismounted and went to the mare's head.

"Stand back, my man," said Spencer; then, taking the bridle himself, he proceeded to soothe and

flatter the terrified animal, passed his hand caressingly over nose and neck, drew down her head by the forelock, and looked into her eyes, talking to her the while as one who understood all that was passing in her mind. As she submitted, after a moment or two, with evident pleasure, to his handling, he next deliberately divested her of her bit, a cumbrous and complicated instrument of torture, and with a firm yet delicate hand inserted between the bruised jaws the simple hunting-snaffle which he had been carrying.

"Great God!" cried a grating voice at Rochester's ear, "what is the fellow doing? That curb was especially devised under my directions. She will be quite uncontrollable now. Madman! he wants to kill the mare as well as himself."

"Do not distress yourself, Herr von Sachs," replied Neuberg. "Mr. Spencer generally knows what he is about, and you may have every confidence that if he attempts to ride Zuleika on the snaffle, it is because she can best be ridden on the snaffle."

Rochester glanced over his shoulder to see Neuberg smiling confidently down upon the infuriated countenance of the Master of the Horse. A little further away the King, a thundercloud gathering upon his brow, stood with folded arms. It was evident that the Philosopher's favour was trembling in the balance.

"I hope there is really no danger," the Queen was heard to murmur, glancing apprehensively at her Royal spouse.

Below, Spencer, his hand upon the mare's glossy shoulder, stood watching her as she craned her neck and champed her new bit with evident relief. He held up Herr von Sachs' model a moment, as if to show the King its monstrous links and curves, then tossed it with a disgusted look to the trainer. Then he gathered the reins slowly into his grasp, and mounted easily—so easily that it seemed as if it must be the simplest matter in the world.

There was a second's breathless pause; the mare plunged, flung up her head, and flung out her feet. Spencer leaned forward, soothing and flattering once more. All at once she broke under his touch into a hand-gallop, and round the field they flew with the sweep of a swallow.

"Ah," cried the Countess softly, breaking the silence, "beautiful. That is beautiful. How he sits. Like a Greek hero. See the ease of grip, the grace of that leg from hip to toe; it is that of the young Lapitha on the Parthenon frieze. And what paces has that mare! Velvet—music!"

"Herr von Sachs," said the King, turning suddenly round to the officer, who, livid, had withdrawn from the balustrade, "do not go away. On the contrary, come here and take a lesson in horsemanship."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE grass was vivid green below, the sky delicate blue in the distance, gay dappled-white overhead ; the breeze blew from the south-east and shook the budding branches in wanton merriment ; the sun shone on the saplings with the love of the father for the growing beings of his making. Young April reigned supreme.

Rochester's soul unfolded like the striving nature around him to a hundred new and sweet impressions—expanded with a feeling of joyous life which was almost poignant. Upon her sudden outcry of admiration, the Countess had turned to him for sympathy ; for a minute she had laid her hand, lithely and warmly alive, as if unconsciously upon his wounded arm, and the very pain of the pressure was delight. He had looked for a moment close into her eyes, now dark with a sudden dilation of pupil. This emotion of hers was not aroused by him, but he could have sworn that before hand and gaze were withdrawn some soft acknowledgment of his own well-favoured presence had been granted to him.

In the flush of this new joy he felt generous enough

to be able to regard his countryman's success below with almost pleasurable admiration.

Neuberg, with dancing blue eyes and an ever-recurring smile on his good-humoured lip, was swimming in unmixed satisfaction. The Court ladies, grouped together in colours as faintly bright as the beds of spring hyacinths behind them that sent their matchless incense abroad with every swing of the breeze, fluttered and twittered together. The King, although keeping Sachs wincing under the occasional roll of his eye, now let the full effulgence of his Royal favour shine out where but a few moments before he had shown nothing but gathering clouds.

If his Master of the Horse had proved himself an ass, at least his chosen guide and friend, his Philosopher, had proved himself more than equal to the occasion; the Royal perspicacity was ratified: it was well for him who had thus ratified it.

Unconscious alike of admiration, astonishment or gracious approval, the Philosopher and the mare thoroughly enjoying themselves in each other's company, were careering round the enclosure where the excellence of the turf, the beauty of the day, the light kind hand of the one and the admirable paces of the other, combined to intoxicate their spirits.

"Did I not say that my old Michael always knows what he is about?" said Neuberg, as the rider now came quietly trotting towards them once more.

"Bravo!" said the King affably. The Professor drew up gently below the terrace and, taking off his

hat, bowed and looked up smiling. There was an immediate sound of fair clapping hands, enthusiastic if thin. "Well, Mr. Spencer," said the King, "I declare we would put you at the head of our stables were it not that we cannot spare you from our council-room; but you must teach us your secret."

"Sire," said Spencer, as still bare-headed he bent forward and flattered the satin neck that arched itself under the caress, "there is no secret. It is but the simple rule which may apply to our dealings alike with man and beast. How often are beings charged with vice which is but that of their masters' making! Your Majesty remembers, perhaps, what our Shakespeare says——"

"Ah, I expected you there," cried the King; "well, what says your Shakespeare?"

"'Deal mildly with his youth; for hot young colts, being raged, do rage the more.'"

"Does he say so indeed? Well, Mr. Spencer, you seem at any rate to be on tolerable understanding with that incurably vicious animal—eh, Colonel Sachs? How do you like her, my friend?"

"Like her!" echoed Spencer. His voice was wont to wax rich and loud under the stress of any enthusiasm; it now rolled up to them without the loss of an inflection. "Will your Majesty allow me once more to borrow better words than my own? Why, 'It is a theme as fluent as the sea. . . . 'Tis a subject for a sovereign to reason on, and for a sovereign's sovereign to ride on. . . . When I bestride her, I soar, I am a hawk; she trots the air, the earth sings when she touches it; the basest

horn of her hoof is more musical than the pipe of Hermes '—"

"Dear sir," said the Queen, laying her hand upon the King's shoulder, and whispering in his ear.

He interrupted her with a rebuking glance.

"It was even my intention," said he, with dignity; and she fell away from him with a deprecating air, while he leant once more over the balustrade. "When you bestride her you soar!" repeated he, with a graciousness of tone and look which no one knew better how to assume. "Then is she more fitted to bear genius. Herr von Sachs, you will be good enough to see that Zuleika be immediately transferred to the Palace stables, and to understand that she now belongs to Mr. Spencer."

Spencer bowed down to the very saddlebow.

Here the Countess, who had not moved in her attitude of intent watching, now shifted her ardent sphinx-like gaze from the Cavalier-Philosopher, straightened her slender figure, and turned round.

"A noble gift nobly bestowed!" cried she, with the privilege of one whose voice may be ever heard. And, turning to the King, she swept him a courtesy, which was as delicately graceful in sentiment as in execution.

The King acknowledged the salutation by a bend of the head, a gleam of the eye, and a smile.

"I am cold," said the Queen, drawing a white crepe shawl about her. "Ladies, shall we not withdraw?" she sighed and shivered.

Spencer came bounding up the steps.

As the little flock drew away, the Countess lin-

gered a moment, looked at him, over her shoulder, and appeared to hesitate. Then she slowly gathered the bunch of violets from her belt. Spencer, seeing the gesture and the look, went straight to her with outstretched hands.

"No," she said, "not all—half."

She divided the little bunch, gave him one half, warm and fragrant, and, holding the other to her lips, slowly moved on.

"All the honours are yours this afternoon, my friend," said the King, who, with a reflective smile, had watched Spencer place the flowers in his breast-pocket.

The Countess wheeled round at the words.

"Kings confer," said she, "subjects receive, honours."

She swept a parting look upon them, which fell before the King's eye with the effect almost of an obeisance, lingered upon Spencer as a caress, and rapidly included Rochester, standing a little in the background, with what he felt was a delicate encouragement.

CHAPTER XXII.

ROCHESTER woke with the dawn, and was struck with a sense of his own faithlessness. He had passed the first day in the capital without even trying to see Eva !—Eva, who had first revealed to his blind puppy eyes what womanhood meant to manhood—Eva, the enchantress who had whisked him away from the insufferable life of tutelage into the fairy realm of liberty, adventure, endless possibilities ; the kind nurse who had watched by his bedside, and wept divine womanly tears over his wounds ; against whose warm bosom he had laid his cheek ! How churlish ! how fickle ! how ungrateful !

What spell had an hour in the company of another woman wrought upon him that it should thus have power to bedim, belittle, nay, render him almost ashamed of, what had been so sweet, so wonderful, so beautiful ? What spirit of unrest and trouble had this Gräfin breathed into him that he should be driven from good-fellowship to spend the hours till far into the night in solitary rambles, profitless fantastic self-communings ?—hours full of most mysterious yet most dear distress. Yet it was of Eva that

he had dreamed. And in his dream the turmoil had given place to peace.

He rose as early as his host, and, having seen him depart upon his morning round of duty, went forth himself to seek some florist's where he could purchase a peace-offering that would smooth the way to pardon.

Bearing triumphantly a vast bundle of hot-house heliotrope, faint-scented, heavy-headed hot-house roses, and a sheaf of lily-of-the-valley, prim, slender, exquisite in its pointed green and tremulous white, he turned his steps to seek the quiet street where he had parted from the Singer.

The Cathedral bells were clashing. An April shower of rain had just spent its pettish fury and the sun shone brightly upon a fresh-washed town. The door of the lodgings was open, and a little red-cheeked, bare-armed, maid was on her knees, slopping water over the flags as if in indoor imitation of the skies. She nodded with an innocently rosy smile at the pretty, pale young gentleman. "Oh, yes, the lady was up; would he give himself the trouble to walk straight up the stairs and knock at the first door?"

And as he mounted the narrow wooden steps Eva's glorious voice came flooding down to him, as liquid, as free, and as golden as the spring sunshine itself. He remembered the first time he had drunk in that sound—not quite a week ago. How far back it seemed! Eva's voice had already become part of his life.

He stood a moment outside the door, listening to

her brisk step, to the interrupted cadence of her song ; then he knocked, and, being unheard, gently opened the door.

Eva, with a white kerchief tied over her streaming hair, clad in a flowered muslin morning gown, crackling clean from the wash, open to the throat and short to the elbow, was flitting about the room, shifting the furniture, re-arranging her flowers, giving, it seemed, the thousand and one dainty touches to her surroundings by which women love to bring their chattels into harmony with themselves.

There was a wholesome freshness in the very air. The plain little room shone with cleanliness. Neuberger's spring flowers bloomed and exhaled fresh scents of field and wood from an old-fashioned majolica bowl.

Eva, with her long ropes of hair curling and crisping as they dried after the bath, with her round white arms, her fine-grained flushing cheek, her spotless muslin, was herself as sweet, as fresh, as fragrant as any wood-blossom.

She whisked round suddenly and saw her visitor.

"So," said she, and looked at him for a moment with round eyes and pursed grave lips. Then she made him a dip, like a country girl. "La!" she cried, "and who may this fine gentleman be?" Next she straightened herself, folded her arms and measured him with proud and reproachful look. "Ah, you may well blush, young man! One day at court and old friends forgot!"

"I protest," he cried; but the fine ingenuous

shades of crimson that chased each other over his cheek protested louder and more truthfully. "I had the headache last night, and was not company for a cat."

"Oh, is that what you call it," said she—"the headache? I thought it was the heart had been at fault. There, I dare say it was both. It is the way with children," she continued from the pretty height of her own twenty years' experience. "A new toy, a new game—good-morning!" She blew a kiss into the air, unfolded her arms, shook out the pleats of her flowery gown, and was once again the original Beau-Sourire. "Now," she said, with her wide smile—that smile which seemed to lay her frank, joyous soul bare before the naked eye, so different from the other smile that had bewitched, mystified, him yesterday, that had promised, and yet held close, things unutterable—"now, I wonder who those flowers are for? For me? Is it possible? How good of you! Oh, the darlings! You know that, when I see flowers, I always want to gather them. When I see pretty children, I always want to hug them. And I think," added Eva, as she dandled her posy and dipped her face into it, "I will tell you a little secret; I think I like to have people's love, too. It is warm; it is good; it is life." She paused, and looked beyond him; and the old wistful yearning grew in her eyes. "And yet," she said, "there is one blossom which it seems will never bloom for me, and I fear that I shall never clasp but other mothers' children. Well, who knows? This is the green month of hope. Shall every dumb dove

have her chosen mate, every ewe her lamb, and not Eva ? ”

She threw her arms up behind her head and stood in the sunpour, and Rochester thought he had never seen so glorious an embodiment of youth and beauty and womanhood. He could almost hear the rich red blood beat in her arteries, feel the strength of the sinews beneath that satin skin, the ripe perfection of life. Was such a one to have no mate ?

Yesterday's enthrallment seemed still to lie in his brain, an unsolved problem, a tantalisation that was almost a pain. But his heart expanded to the old warm charm with a sense of unmixed rest and pleasure—"Dear, earthly, human, laughing Eva !" as Neuberg said.

"Eva dear," said he coaxingly, in the familiar way which, unrebuked, he had likewise been permitted to assume, "I feel that I could love you very much, if you would let me."

Eva wheeled upon him as he sidled up to her with his left arm extended invitingly, arrested his progress with one quick glance, and then burst out laughing.

"You ?" said she ; "I dare say. No, no, my dear little man, neither you with your heliotrope nor yet Neuberg, poor fellow ! with his primroses. Very sweet they are, and dear boys are both of you—and I should be the poorer without them and you. But there is a note you have not struck to start the song of my soul, and strike it, I fear, neither of you ever will, and so there is no good serenading. And, by

the way, how is the arm? What brings you here so early?"

"I dreamed of you," said the Duke, with a sentimental look.

"Oh!" said Eva, as she vanished into the next room to fill a flower-vase. "And I was very nice?" she asked when she came back. "Take care: dreams, you know, go by contraries. Well, since you are here, you may stay a little while; but you find me busy. I have, you see, just washed my hair, and when I have tidied my room—since I had to send that ungrateful pair of servants of mine packing, I have everything to do myself—I must begin to study my part. You shall be audience—critic, if you like."

The Duke sat astride on one of the cane-chairs, and watched her as she moved. She took a sprig of heliotrope, a rose, and a spike of lily-of-the-valley, and fastened them in her bosom. Then she bent her head and sniffed at them, and looked up and smiled at the donor. "Dear Eva!" thought he again to himself, and his whole being swam in a sunny sea of content.

"How do you like my rooms?" she asked, whisking the kerchief off her head, to wipe up some water that had overflowed from a vase. "Neuberg chose them for me—the good soul! to the very letter what I had commanded. Comfortably within my means. With people, respectable, proper—oh, how proper! And a good motherly dame into the bargain: my very address is a letter of recommendation. For a poor girl alone," said she, pausing a

second to make a ball of her kerchief and throw it through the half-open door, "with you heedless young men trooping in with bouquets at eight o'clock in the morning, the advantage is enormous! They look home-like already, do they not?"

Following her glance, Rochester gazed round upon a curious mixture of meagre simplicity and luxury. A couple of richly-brocaded cushions, out of the travelling carriage, lay on the plain green rep sofa; silver-mounted crystals were strewn on the ugly little chiffonier; a tiny Vernis Martin clock stood on the extinct white china stove; a piece of Persian embroidery, glowing with the tones of a peacock's feather, was flung over the new piano.

"In Vienna," said she, "one has to fight so hard for one's position, that I should have been lost had I been seen in rooms like these. I had my carriage there, young man, and two men-servants, besides that wretched girl. Not a penny laid by, I assure you. But here, in this little place, I shall economise." She laughed, as if the bare idea were a huge joke. "La! there goes the door bell! My accompanist, I am sure, and my hair not dry yet!" she ran her fingers through it, and held it out from her shoulders like wings; it fell below her waist, with the luxuriance that characterised the whole woman.

"Never mind," she said, and threw it back. "It will be all the better for the disconsolate heroine. Come in!"

The accompanist halted on the threshold to stare from the dishevelled Diva to the pale, cool young

man with his arm in a sling, who seemed established in her intimacy. He had a long, sallow face, protuberant eyes, long, straw-coloured, plastered hair. Nervousness was oozing from every pore. Poverty rode him in his garments, but on his brow sat Music.

The Duke glanced at him, and then to Eva with a smile; but she had suddenly become metamorphosed into another woman—an Eva Visconti he had not yet met, Eva the worker.

"Good-morning, Herr Pzriborzki; you have brought the score, I see. Come, my friend, to the clavier; we have a hard day before us."

He struck a note, she pitched her voice. His bony fingers flew with a master touch and ran in pearly ripples.

Now they were both all music, and the Duke gazed as a man might upon the evolutions of beings from another sphere. They repeated, they hung upon one note; she tried it from one attitude, then from another; she trilled till the air vibrated again; now from wide-open mouth issued a rushing torrent of sound, which shook the narrow limits of the room with its impetuous volume, now a rivulet of melody as smooth as a silk thread made the world swoon.

At length Eva stopped.

"A little respite," she said.

Herr Pzriborzki mopped his dripping brow and became once more acutely conscious of his insignificant personality.

"Astonished, are you, Duke?" cried Eva; and

Rochester became aware that his eyes and mouth were still round signals of wonder. "You thought singers grew on walls like peaches, I suppose? that one had a voice like the nightingale; one had only to open one's beak and out it comes? Charming gift, happy bird! Ah, friend Pzriborzki, we know better, do we not? Music is a hard mistress, and her votaries are slaves. A voice, sir, is as hard to build as a palace. You may have the site, you may have the stones—and you must have them, of course; but before you can raise the edifice which is going to delight yourself and all beholders, ah me, what labour! Stone by stone, note by note! What precautions! An indigestion—a hurricane! a sore throat—an earthquake! Cracked from roof to cellar for your pains. And, O Lord, the repairs! And then," she went on, "it is not as if one were a great composer, or painter, or architect, or writer; barely have you had time to breathe and enjoy, and say: *It is done*, when—patatra!—the whole place comes crumbling down about your ears. Finished! finished! Before you know where you are, you are old and silent, and only memory is left. Ah, it is but fair that the singer should reign Queen—while she lasts!"

The idea, as she formulated it, seemed to strike her with a cruel force. With a sorrowful curve upon her mouth she stood for a moment staring out into the blue, like one reading her fate. The poor musician rolled his pale eye towards her, the words of burning sympathy welling up in his soul, only to perish upon his bashful tongue.

"Come, come," said she, all of a sudden, and tapped him hard on the shoulder, "to work! We will keep to the first act, if you please."

And wires and voice fell once more into harmony.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ACROSS the thrill of a bravura passage there rang from the street below a clatter of horses' hoofs. A minute later the jingling of spurs, the sound of a steel scabbard smiting the banisters, the creaking of the wooden stairs under a hasty tread, mingled with the dying fall of a high note.

"Come in!" sang she, anticipating the knock, and weaving the words into her score.

Blue and silver filled the doorway, surmounted by Neuberg's smile; a little behind, the serene lines of Spencer's countenance were cut like a cameo upon the shadow. Eva turned her eyes upon them, forbidding interruption, and her tapping finger peremptorily maintained the accompanist in a straight course, as he showed sign of wavering.

With a pantomimic grimace at Rochester, expressing much surprise and indignation at finding himself thus early forestalled, Neuberg slid into a chair and bent forward, his elbows on his knees, to drink in with ears and eyes every grace of his beloved. Folding his arms reposefully, Spencer leant against the doorpost, and soon his eyes wandered from the face of

the singer to the square of blue sky, the network of budding lime-trees outside the window. And upon the wings of her voice his thoughts seemed to take flight to distant regions.

The heroine's last song in the first act was, of course, a love-song, and Rochester soon became aware, with some amusement, a little pity, and a good deal of pique (not the pique of love, but the pique of a young man's self-love, which is, perhaps, the most constant, the most irritable, the most tormenting of all his soul's companions), that it was to Spencer alone that Eva sang it; that, moreover, she now sang with a passion which far outstripped the former careful art and method.

The last note melted away in such exquisite gradation that it seemed only the absolute silence that revealed its cessation.

Eva stood, blushing, and looked to Spencer as a child looks for approval. He woke with a start, as from a dream, came forward, took both her hands, and kissed them.

"Oh, my dear child," said he, "you have transported me—I don't know where—into those indescribable lands which are beyond the reach of words! What a power it is that you carry in that white throat! For not only do you voice the souls of great musicians, who without you would be dumb, but you set other men's souls taking up the strain and making music too."

She smiled, but her eye was wistful and dissatisfied as it searched his face. She felt the emotion raised in him, felt, as it were, the presence of Love;

A but a thousand instincts told her she had nevertheless no real share in it.

"Divine Eva!", said Neuberg rhapsodically, caught a frill of her starched muslin and kissed it fervently.

"Does—does the gracious lady require me any more?" stammered Herr Pzriborzki, turning away a fluttering and apprehensive eye, like that of a netted rabbit.

She hesitated a moment; then:

"Come again at five," she said. "I have had enough for this morning."

In an agony of politeness, the musician made his four separate bows, found himself mercifully near the door, and fled.

"Is this the sort of early worm you pick up of a morning, you nightingale?" said Neuberg, idiotic with irrepressible love, pointing to Rochester as he spoke.

"It is not usually so much to the worm's advantage to be up so early," retorted Rochester, with some complacency.

"Leave my wormlet alone," said Eva. "And, talking of little worms, about that foundling of yours, Spencer; has anyone thought of making the poor thing a Christian? I want to be godmother, you know. She shall be called Eva, poor little daughter of Eve!"

"You women keep the world warm with your kind hearts," said Spencer in a low voice. "Another beautiful lady," he went on—and a little embarrassment, strange in one who was never yet known to be

embarrassed, crept into voice and manner—"has forestalled you. So harmoniously do gracious thoughts spring."

Eva's whole bright face changed, darkened like a suddenly clouded sky.

"Ah! And what is the child's name to be?" she asked at length in a voice from which all life had fled.

"Julia," replied he.

"Julia," repeated she, and lingered over the liquid syllables with harsh intonation.

Rochester felt himself flush. Neuberg averted his eyes.

"I think," said Eva abruptly, "if you do not mind, my good friends, that I am very tired. I must ask you to leave me."

She strove to cloak her pain with a dignity as new to her as Spencer's conscious and troubled air to him. The three men filed out with a futile attempt to carry off the situation.

Outside in the street they halted for a moment and looked at each other.

"Oh, what a selfish animal I am!" cried Neuberg, and stamped his foot. "Here have I been rejoicing these two days to think that the coast was being cleared for me. And it was sorrow preparing for my poor girl. She would never give up hope before—till she knew you loved elsewhere."

"I think," said Spencer, "that I will walk home alone."

"And so will I," said Neuberg.

Rochester lingered awhile. Another storm was

threatening in the April sky. The street had grown quite dark. In his mind's eye he saw Eva, her hands outstretched on the table, her face pressed down upon them, weeping. Yet as he walked slowly and aimlessly forward, he found himself repeating the name of "Julia."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I WILL inform the Countess of your presence," said the maid to the Duke.

She was tall and lithe, with that false air of her mistress which these confidential servants have the talent of taking to themselves. She turned with a flounce of skirts and lace apron, and left upon him an impression of flashing teeth, a sallow face, and half-hidden rose-coloured knot. She was coquetish, somehow, yet eminently *de grande maison*.

He had been handed from the Palace door-keeper to the Jäger that guarded the discreet portals of the Countess de Lucena's apartments; from him delivered to a supple backed, mellifluous Italian major-domo, who, while conducting him to the antechamber, professed himself unable to pronounce upon his mistress's readiness to receive visits. But the soubrette who now admitted him into the inner sanctuary seemed to carry the key of the situation. She took the Duke's card and declared that her ladyship would be with him in a few minutes.

It was part of the young Englishman's upbringing that he should regard the ceremonial that surrounds rank as a natural and necessary element in existence.

While throwing himself heart and soul into the almost Bohemian emancipation of his present life, he never lost the consciousness that it would be but a brief experience ; that his passage through it was a mere caprice ; that his real vocation lay amid the dignities, the honours and the formalities that awaited him in England.

It was, therefore, with a sensation of returning to his own proper atmosphere that he trod the thick pile carpets and that he coldly addressed the low-voiced decorous attendants. While awaiting his hostess, he looked round upon her habitation with approving eyes.

The French taste, the florid gilding, the general crimson magnificence of what he had seen of the King's Palace had seemed to his fastidious eye garish and barbarous. Here was what he was accustomed to. At first all looked very subdued ; brocades mellowed by age into such softness of tints that the magnificence of their texture passed almost unperceived ; inlaid cabinets of Italian work, over the mosaic of whose curved flanks the matchless polish of years had cast a luminous yellow glow like that which at once softens and heightens the tones of old pictures. There was a flash of olive bronze in corners and recesses ; a sheen of painted leather ; a glint of gold on the curvetting Florentine frames. Here an enamel glowed with deep fires from dim settings ; there, books in ancient garbs all brown and ivory yellow, ran an uneven race round the walls, hand-high. Brown brightening into gold, melting into amber, fading yet again to ivory : that was the

pervading *motif*—the palms, rising tropically high, the bowls of violets purple and mauve, the single jar of delicate lilac, only accentuated the ruling harmony.

If a woman desires to create a strong impression, it is not bad policy on her part to give a man time to absorb the atmosphere of her usual surroundings—for the surroundings reflect her personality as the mother-of-pearl shell the pearl itself.

As Rochester stood and gazed, an extraordinary impression of beauty, of costliness and voluptuous luxury took possession of his senses. Down to the smallest detail there was nothing in that room that did not seem to have an artistic as well as an actual value. But, above all, it was the Beautiful that had been sought. It was less of a lady's boudoir than a temple to the cult of Beauty; and the eye and the hand that had filled it had been more moved by the antique Greek notion than by any mediæval mysticism or latter-day eclecticism. To the Countess de Lucena, as to the Greeks of old, the Beautiful seemed to have found its highest expression in the perfection of the human form. No single one of the many exquisite bronze figures but had been chosen as representing some type of physical beauty; whether it were the almost feminine grace of a young Antinous, or the sapling slenderness of an Apollo, the airy figure of a flying Mercury or the splendour of a Discobolus's braced muscles; or yet the calm, chaste strength of a Diana. Nothing that hinted of age or of violent emotion, or any phase of the struggling side of existence, had been admitted within

these walls—nothing but what breathed of the flower of youth, of the first ripeness of manhood, or of the serenity of God-like power, and all else in the room was made cognate with these types.

The Duke looked wonderingly around. He had seen the original of many of these treasures in his late wanderings ; but he had seen them then with tired, indifferent eyes. Here, for the first time, to his naturally refined soul, the eternal power of beauty, the true spirit of art, began to whisper their revealing messages.

And when an unseen door rolled noiselessly back, and, most beautiful of all beautiful things in that deliberately beautiful room, the Countess herself came in upon him, with no more sound than a faint rustle, halted on the great lion skin on the hearth, where the logs smouldered with faint odour of forest spice, and stood for a moment, very upright and still, looking at him smiling with lids half-closed, it seemed to him as if some wonderful antique dream of divine loveliness had been clothed with life at last.

Her garments were of the tint of the morning mists, faintly violet ; her hair, an impalpable brown, sprang nimbus-like from the ivory of her face.

“ Half goddess ”—the Duke looked at her with earnest, ardent young eyes—“ whole goddess ! ” thought he. And in her filmy garb he seemed to see her rise divine and dazzling—a vision materialised : Phœbe, emerging from the clouds—Phœbe, or rather Diana, before the bewildered gaze of the awakened Endymion, a revelation at once of divinity and of love ! He was all unconscious

that to her, with his own stripling grace, he looked, despite his modern disguise, as if the bronze of her young Narcissus had taken to itself a warmth of living flesh.

"It is very good of you to come and see me, Duke," said the goddess in English, and held out her hand.

And Rochester fell from the heights of Latmus.

"Wholly *grande dame*!"—the very incarnation of modern aristocracy, civilization, refinement. How had he come upon such heathen thoughts?

She passed over his momentary confusion with ease. He found himself seated beside her on the sofa, talking glibly of himself and of his affairs, before he had had time to realise how it came about.

She knew some of his relations in England; in fact, they were actually connected by marriage. Her father had known him during the latter's brief diplomatic career. She took the boy's absolute independence as a matter of fact, touched upon his wanderings without surprise or too much curiosity. She made him feel a man; she made him feel the Duke, for she treated him as an equal, yet with a subtle show of appreciation for his rank.

To some women it seems a great art to make men pleased with them. But there are a few others that rise to the higher art of making men pleased with themselves, and those are the women whose irresistible fascination puzzles and enrages their less successful rivals.

"And so you have been in Italy?" she said.
"My Italy! the land of beauty! You know"—

she spoke confidentially—"I am very proud of being an English woman ; I would not exchange my birth-right to sit on a throne. But though I was a mere child when I went to Italy, I felt as if I had come home : everything there was familiar to me, everything sweet. With the intellect, you see, I am English ; with the heart, a daughter of the South. Or, as I sometimes think, it is only my blood that is English, while my soul is that of some antique Roman lady who lived in a dream of marble palaces, or, at least, of some early renaissance Tuscan who ruled with the Medici in an age given up to the glory of living. Whatever I was, I was a pagan," she said. "Do you believe, Duke, in the transmigration of souls ?"

Here she smiled ; and Rochester, bewildered already, lost every thread of connected thought in the contemplation of those curving lips and those narrowing eyes.

"I do not know," he stammered.

"Oh, you," she went on, with just a faint note of laughter that rippled the veiled evenness of her voice, "of course not ! Are you not going to be one of the pillars of our glorious English Church and Constitution ?—unless, indeed, you, too, have some sort of a pagan soul hidden within you. Do you know, you look as if you might have known the days when the beautiful gods of old walked the earth sometimes. Come, confess : you remember sacrificing to Pan in some mountain temple ? I for one remember distinctly when I was a Canephora in the pageants of Spring. Every April I feel it within me : I am sure

you do the same. I am sure we met in those delicious days—look at me, have you forgotten? Only two thousand years—you cannot have forgotten so soon!”

She looked at him; and he, looking back again, was all lost in the wonder of eyes that seemed to change their shade from light to dark, from mockery to earnest-like cloud-reflecting lakes: now wide open, the iris shone large, yellow-gray, as water under a dull sky; but even as he looked the pupils expanded and spread and enveloped him in a soft velvet twilight. Whatever soul he had, whether antique or modern, from that moment he surrendered it to her.

“As for me,” she pursued dreamily, “I am constantly meeting with souls that I have known in old-world days—Mr. Spencer, for instance; I am convinced I knew him in Attica, when he paced the Lycæum, and lured by the music of his speech all that was noble in the youth of the land.”

“Mr. Spencer seems a very original person,” said the Duke, with a shade of flatness in his tone. Then, half choked by the beating of his own audacious heart: “What did we do,” he asked, “when we met two thousand years ago?”

She did not answer, but only looked at him again, and presently her lips parted with a little secret smile, which seeing, for very innocence, he blushed and cast down his eyes. When she next addressed him, she had fallen back into the easy manner of the woman of the world.

“Oh,” she said, “how I must be shocking you!

You do not know me yet, you see. Do not tell them in England about this confession of faith ; let them think that my creed is still wrapped up in the Thirty-nine Articles." And she laughed lightly.

The Duke longed to speak, to find something brilliant to say. He would have given a great deal to have shown himself clever, aspiring, tender, but did not know how ; if he had, would not have ventured. He kept his eyes fixed on the delicate long fingers and filbert nails that rested on the rose brocade cushion next to him, and his thoughts were whirled along the current of what seemed a wildly daring vision ; the bliss indescribable of laying his lips on that satin skin so near him.

Was it possible that in those days she spoke of he might have been allowed this favour—nay, could it have been possible that when she was a flower-maiden and he a piping shepherd they had been lovers . . . and he had kissed her lips ? At the thought, from crimson that his cheeks had been, they went quite pale, and because the feeling of her presence became an agitation too great to be borne with dignity, the Duke rose to take his leave.

He bent over her hand. To draw near her was like coming upon a bed of violets in the sunshine. He turned and bowed again as he neared the door. She stood once more upon the lion's skin, smiling after him ; she had lifted both her hands to her head, and was resetting the jewelled dagger in her hair. He saw the outline of her bust and hips against the firelit space, the bend of her waist, the spring of her lithe thighs, and he realised suddenly that in

her seeming etherealness she was, after all, the most exquisite of women. His brain seemed now to be floating, like that of a man in the first and glorious stage of intoxication, on the stave of a song; he stepped airily across the threshold astride.

They exchanged a few words, abstracted on both sides. The young Duke felt condescending: Spencer, the eccentric commoner, might love that high-born lady as eccentrically as he chose, but he could never meet her upon the ground which he, Rochester, had just trod.

But as the door of the ante-chamber opened, while yet he stood waiting for his cloak, a little joyous cry, as soft as a cooing dove's, was wafted to him.

"Ah, I have just been talking of you——"

Here the door closed again, and as the youth stepped out on the terrace there was no music, but discord, within him.

"Hang it!" he said, and wished he could make the Countess know, "I will spend the evening with poor Eva."

CHAPTER XXV.

"I WAS talking of you," said the Gräfin, "to that boy."

If the Duke could, unperceived, have seen her then, he would have been amazed to find a very different woman. As Julia de Lucena stood before Spencer and yielded her hand to his gravely courteous kiss—a greeting which, as he gave it, seemed only the natural homage of the gentleman to the lady—in some sort of magic way the flower of her wonderful girlhood bloomed in her again.

"What good wind has blown you hither?" she cried in Italian, as he lifted his head and his eyes met hers.

Her lips trembled a little as she spoke; the blood rose faintly to her cheek. She hardly knew herself what had come to her. But the Philosopher thought her sudden timidity adorable, her confusion the perfection of grace.

"I came because I could not help it," he said in the same language, which was as familiar to his tongue as to hers.

She let herself sink back among her cushions languidly, and her eyelids fell, dimly purple-shadowed,

the most delicate curtains that were ever dropped before the window of woman's soul. She felt that his gaze was still upon her face. No human being had ever yet seen that kindling in Spencer's eyes.

She knew within herself—and she had not made in vain a varied and searching study of mankind for seven years—that it may be but once in a century that the God of Love finds such material for his holocaust. She, who had always sought for the best the world could give, was seized with an inner tremor of joy.

"Would you have helped coming—if you could?" she asked, after a pause.

The man still kept her under his ardent gaze. Then all at once he got up from the low seat he had taken beside her sofa and walked up and down the room. She watched as some witch might watch the effect of a spell, confident in the result, yet curious of its phases.

"Donna Julia," said he, halting in front of her, "the petty conventions of polite society have always ill-fitted my tongue. Now I will straightway tell you the truth. From the time that I could think at all every aspiration of my being has been towards freedom, bodily and mental; from the instant that I had power to shape my life for myself I shaped it free. In spite of strong sympathies, warm feelings, my soul has dwelt alone. Not only the soul, but the mind—aye, every physical instinct of the body of this death." He struck his great chest as he spoke. "I have gone unmated of choice; I have repudiated the ordinary ties of humanity; I have

never said to a woman, '*I love you*'; I have never built myself a home and thought, '*Here will I dwell*'; I have given no hostages to fortune. The bare thought of bondage, even that bondage of the senses and of affections which makes life sweet to most, was to me intolerable."

She listened silently. His face was troubled; he had run his hand through his hair, and it stood almost on end. "Yes," she thought to herself—"yes, you are beautiful; you are worth conquering." And behind that thought was yet another thought struggling into birth. "You are almost worthy of me."

"Well?" she said.

The word fell from her lips into the silence like a pearl.

"Well," echoed Spencer, in accents of almost reproachful passion, "what is it you have done to me? First, I was happy in your presence, merely because I saw you beautiful of body, found you beautiful of mind, and felt you beautiful of heart."

The listener's eyes glistened with a quick flame, instantly veiled.

"But a week ago, when you gave me back those flowers I had sent you—sent you but as the appropriate offering to such as you—what did you do to me? It was but one look, I think, but it has robbed me of my dearest possession. This can be no news to you; you must have seen it. I am no longer myself. I have not slept because you haunted me; or if I slept, I dreamt of you . . . such dreams. Waking, you are by my pillow; the very river pass-

ing my windows wears at dawn the livery of your eyes. I find you in the mists ; you rise in glory with the sun. You sit in my little room as I try to read ; you look at me from the wine cup ; you walk with me in the street ; I hear your voice in the music of another woman's song. I have reasoned with myself. . . . Reason ! " He flung the word from him with the scorn of the warrior for a faithless weapon. " I have fought with myself—only to know myself beaten. To-day, like a coward, I wanted to run away. I had a travelling carriage at my door to take me—I do not know where—somewhere, far away from you. Yet when I stood with my foot on the step I saw that in the vacant place beside me you were sitting, and I knew that, were it as far as the east is from the west, wherever I went I should have to take you too." There fell another pause. " And so," said the Philosopher, with a sudden change of tone, " I come because I cannot help it."

" And now that you are here," said she simply, but her voice thrilled like a viol, " say, is it not sweet ? "

He stared at her for a second like one who, groping, sees sudden light. The next instant he was down on his knees beside her, and again his lips were pressed upon her hand. But this was now no mere ceremonious act of homage, it was the kiss of unresisting love. Again, as he looked up, their eyes met, and then she, who had sipped at the cup of life with such Epicurean science, felt upon her lips this man's virgin kiss.

And great was the glory of it. A sob rose in her throat, and a tear that she drove back from her eyes fell upon her heart with a regret the bitterness of which she had never tasted before. The next instant the fleeting impression was gone, the bliss that invaded her being was at last without alloy.

Julia de Lucena was not the woman to prolong a situation beyond its triumphant point of perfection. Her cultivated fastidiousness could not brook even the first shadow of the unavoidable descent from ecstasy. She forestalled the slackening arms; she denied the second kiss. In another moment she was solitary and unapproachable amid her cushions, and he who had craved that second kiss sat dreaming of it at his former distance, little of the philosopher, all the man, awakened in his full manhood to love—that eternal negation of philosophy! She felt herself mistress of the situation.

"I, too," she said, as if continuing the conversation, "have always hugged my liberty. I was bound once." Her face became set for a transient space into a mask of singular and vindictive disgust. "It was my initiation into life—love. Love!" she repeated, in tones of irony, cutting as a steel blade; and then she proceeded dreamily: "Love that is worthy of the name, real love, is as free as your visions of freedom themselves. Why should you and I, that know this, be afraid of it?"

The momentary harsh impression of the first words was resolved like discord into renewed harmony by the exquisite caress of the voice. She

had that rare gift of bringing her whole personality into the tune of what she meant to express. Lip, eye, the bend of the head, the relaxation that seemed to pervade her whole bearing, spoke more subtly, more irresistibly than the words. Spencer leaned forward, and took her hand once more.

"Do you know so much of life," he said, "and have you learnt such hard lessons, and yet can you say that love is free?" There was regret in his voice, but his deep gaze glowed in unconscious contradiction. "That love is beautiful I always knew; you have made me feel it. But——"

He bowed his head as if taking leave of his liberty, bowed it till his lips touched her hands, and then she felt his kisses burn.

Her steady hold upon herself began to escape her. Were she to lose him now, she thought, it would be blankness unutterable—worse, failure! And yet what a rival she had to combat!

"But neither you nor, I need be bound," she whispered at last, after a lengthy pause, stooping to his ear. "Can we not love and be free? Need there be a promise between us? Why should our love be of the earth's pattern? Our love shall be for ourselves, and the world shall pass the sanctuary of our happiness and never guess the secret. Oh, I know that, thinker as you are, you are above the world's conventions! Can you not see that I, too, despise them?"

He raised his head and looked at her. His face was pale, but his eyes shone with steady light.

He looked like one who has measured the sacrifice and found it worthy of him.

"You speak," said he, "like the woman you are. In your ethereal aspirations you walk the land of visions; but I cannot meet you there. No, no, Julia, no, on that plane there is no treading for my feet; you must come down, my goddess, for this love of mine is but human. You think, poor child, that it is the promise that binds, and the earthly tie! Do you not understand that when I kissed you I gave myself to you? When you kissed me you belonged to me! What oath, what vow can be so binding as the first rite of the love that gives man and woman to each other? Let the vows before God, the compact before men, follow after the world's way. Convention, what of it? It is but the freedom to wear our chains, since wear them we must. I could not be more consecrated to you than I am now."

There was a moment's breathless silence. She put her hands to her face to hide the rush of furious blood that dyed her forehead, and the convulsion of anger that distorted her mouth. The simple fool! What burgher platitudes were these? He talked of her as standing on the heights, and invited her down to his level. His level—the mockery of it!

Then she felt his hands upon hers, gently drawing them away, and saw him look at her with troubled face and reverential, almost worshipping glance, and she—she, Julia de Lucena—blushed well-nigh to faintness.

"The love you have known," he went on, "has been that which should not bear the name; but do not fear my love. Are you not sacred to me, since I love you?"

At these words she stared at him, and there came over her the whirl of yet another change—a wild, mad wish that she could stand indeed before him, virgin of mind, such as he deemed her.—A hidden spring gushed up within her soul, a flood of purifying waters, bitter to suffocation, yet passing sweet.

Still, with haggard face she stared back at him until the tenderness in his eyes was more than she could endure, and her own overflowed. She let herself sink into his arms, the whole structure of her life, such as she had made it, seeming to fall to pieces around her. And as she now, by impulse, yielded to him the kiss that her calculations had withheld, there was but one articulate thought left in her soul; cost what it might, she would not lose that man.

* * * * *

Rachele, the Countess's accomplished tire-woman, had a tolerably varied experience of her mistress's moods. But when, a couple of hours after the last visitor had departed, she once more entered her presence, bearing a message from the Queen, she found her lady in a condition that no precedent had taught her how to cope with. Half prostrate upon the lion's skin, half propped up against the couch, lay Donna Julia, her arms outstretched with

a gesture of lethargic weariness, her face pallid and disfigured with passionate weeping.

No man is a hero to his valet. What woman can keep on her mask before her private maid? The Countess lifted her dimmed eyes.

"Rachele," she said, in the liquid Italian that was more familiar to her throat than the mother tongue itself, "if priests or fools tell you that you have freewill, do not believe them. We are blind puppets led by—by what? Fate, Providence, or the Devil?"

Rachele's wits were quick, but here she groped. With a cheerful profanity she answered, because she knew not what else to answer: Oh, she had never allowed Providence or priests to trouble her; and as for the Devil, she had never found him hard to get on with now, whatever he might be by-and-by.

The girl's cynical philosophy spurred to further reaction her mistress's humour—a humour already disposed to turn, with the disgusted shame of the habitually worldly, from any genuinely generous emotion.

She sprang to her feet and pushed her tossed hair from her face.

"You have had many lovers?" she said abruptly.

"Yes, madam," said the maid simply.

The while the word was as light in darkness. She swiftly connected the stately figure of the English professor with this extraordinary distress, and though her impassive sallow countenance betrayed no sign, she inwardly grimaced her disapproval to

herself. If it had been, now the pretty boy—at least he was a Duke—but that fellow with the old cloak. . . .

"Well, and what do you think of love?" went on the lady. "Did you ever find it worth the giving up of anything?"

"Oh, *Dio*, madam," said Rachele, in her candid way; "I would not give up my dinner for a pinch of salt. Love is good, and so is salt. But, my faith! salt is cheap, and so is love. I find salt go well with my dinner, and, thank Heaven! as I say, it is cheap enough, so that all can put it in the pot."

"I see you are very wise," said the Countess. She took three steps towards the door of her room. "What was it you said? The Queen has sent for me? That is strange. She has not sent for me for many days. Well, I must be a pretty spectacle! Get me my black dress."

But as she sat before the glass and deftly spread a mist of rouge on her pale cheek, she suddenly paused in her task, and looked at her maid in the glass. Their eyes met.

"It is all very well, Rachele," she said, "but what were one's meals if one had to give up the salt? How mawkish the most delicate dish!"

She sighed, and took up the hare's foot again.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONSCIOUS that all her art had not been able to obliterate the traces of her emotion, the Countess held her head higher and moved with a more languid grace than usual—that grace which would be haughty if it took the trouble—as she crossed the ante-chamber of the Queen's apartments.

A couple of pages surveyed her curiously. One of the Queen's gentlemen, meeting her, recognised her with that light of admiration that she scarcely ever failed to evoke in his sex. He would have spoken, but fell back with an abashed bow beneath the abstraction of her glance. The Queen was not in her private sitting-room, but the old Baroness de Melk, who was more or less the chief of the Queen's household and her constant companion, came to her in a few moments, and told her briefly that Her Majesty was awaiting her in her bedroom.

These two ladies had small love for each other, being rivals in the Royal favour. Their eyes crossed like blades, and as the Countess trailed her black draperies wearily towards the door, the old Austrian dame gazed after her with vindictive triumph.

The Queen's bedchamber looked towards the west, and this evening it was full of ruby light.

The Queen sat in her armchair with her back to the window. The level rosy ray caught the oval of her cheek, but could not paint it bright. She was wrapped in a loose dressing-gown of white brocade that threw into strong relief her sallowness and the red stains around her eyelids. Her heavy black hair, of that sort that lends itself ungraciously to curls and ringlets, hung straight and dishevelled from the temples. She, too, it seemed, had passed through one of those storms which ravage a woman's fairness. She looked up at the slim black figure as it straightened itself after its sweeping courtsey, marked with unerring quickness and with a twist of the heart that the lady-in-waiting had been weeping also, but that the tears had scarcely dimmed—nay, that they but added to—her beauty. Her hostile eyes grew pitiless. And these two had been as sisters!

"Your Majesty has sent for me," said the Gräfin, breaking the heavy silence.

"Yes," answered the Queen.

Her swollen eye kept up its scrutiny—a scrutiny growing in its intensity from angry hardness to passionate searching.

To return such a glance without either impertinence, brazenness, or wavering, would have been a feat for any woman to perform, however clear her conscience. But there was not a flaw in the Gräfin's bearing. The proudest self-respect, the nicest deference—she conveyed the expression of these oppos-

ing sentiments, after the fashion peculiar to herself, not only in her look and bearing, but in every fold of the black draperies that fell around her in her reposeful attitude of waiting. Uncertainty began to break up the Queen's severity of demeanour; it was her eye that fell. Looking on the ground, she spoke at last in forced, broken sentences.

"I never thought it would come to this between us. I have lately noticed——"

Her fingers, very thin and frail, clasped the arms of her chair convulsively. A wave of burning blood, rising, it would seem, from some hidden depth of anger and bitterness, suddenly dyed her forehead crimson. She looked up again. The eyes of the woman were eloquent with a reproach that the lips of the Queen could not with dignity speak. With an abrupt movement she rose to her feet, and they faced each other on a level.

"In short," said the Royal lady, this time with icy determination, "it is clear, Countess, that this foreign air doesn't agree with your health. Others have noticed it. I myself have been forced to notice it. You are greatly changed. For your own sake"—she repeated the word emphatically—"for your own sake—I do not speak of my peace of mind—I have come to the conclusion that you must return to your home. I have told His Majesty so, and!"—she paused and shot a piercing look—"His Majesty agrees."

The Countess de Lucena swayed, but so slightly that the movement was imperceptible even to the eager watcher. She dropped her lids over her eyes

and closed her teeth for an instant upon her underlip ; but beneath her rouge the ebbing of her blood was masked.

The genius of the born general lies not so much in personal courage as in facing an emergency, grasping its full import, and instantly taking the lead against it, even if it involve heavy sacrifice. Secure as she had felt in her own power, here was an attack the possibility of which the Gräfin had never thought of, never anticipated. Nevertheless, her hesitation was but the pause necessary for the change of front and the re-ordering of her forces.

"Madam," said she—and the first accent of her voice conveyed with perfect respect a delicate rebuke—"every word that your Majesty has spoken is another drop to my already overflowing cup of sorrow and——" She halted with calculated effect, then added: "Yes, I will say it, for I cannot believe you will misunderstand me, Madam—sorrow and remorse."

The Queen fell back in her seat, crimson.

"Do you dare?"

The words seemed trembling on her lips. She put up her hands quickly to stifle them.

"When your Majesty sent for me I was on the point of requesting a private interview, and only delayed till the traces of these tears should have passed away." The Gräfin pointed to her eyes with a superb gesture. "Your Majesty has forestalled me—forestalled my request and my confession."

Once more she paused with calculated emotion.

"Your confession?" said the Queen. "You have

said too much or too little, Julia. I command you to speak."

The Countess sketched a courtesy, and, with bent head and low, distinct voice, obeyed.

"In order that your Majesty may understand me," she began, "it is necessary that I should touch upon what was once my pride, my joy—upon what is now at the same time a consoling and a torturing memory—the friendship which for six years you have deigned to show me—a friendship cemented by that youthful vow of our young, generous days, when I swore never to leave your side, and you swore to love me like a sister."

The Queen winced, and her lip trembled.

"When I left my adopted land, my friends, my home, to follow your Majesty in your new life, it was not, permit me to say it, for the honour of serving the Queen, but for the happiness of remaining near the friend. This happiness made a sacrifice a pleasure. Upheld by the conviction that your Majesty shared these feelings, I have found more than compensation for all personal troubles. I have been able to despise the malice of my enemies; and, Madam, I have some bitter ones here, who would gladly see me lose that favour which has created so many jealousies. Thus it was till but a little time ago. Then your Majesty has seen it—I cannot deny it, there did come a change. I, who thought myself so safe in the double armour of my devotion to your Majesty and your attachment to myself—I found myself weak, *weak*. Oh, Madam, believe me, I did not succumb without a struggle. My

loyalty to yourself, my pride, my peace of mind, my position at your side—all, all was at stake! I felt to the heart's core your change of manner to me. I dared seek no explanation, for I knew in my heart that I had failed; I allowed love, love to conquer me."

"Good God, woman!" cried the Queen, "these words to my face!"

The Countess started and gazed at her mistress's infuriated countenance with the reproachful eye of a startled gazelle.

"I had hoped," she murmured, in a voice that seemed choked with tears, "that your Majesty, herself so happily married, would have a little compassion, a little understanding for another woman's heart, for one who has already suffered so cruelly where she ought to have been most blessed."

"Julia, what do you mean?" interrupted the Queen passionately. The Countess had dallied with her Royal Mistress's anguish with the most delicate deliberation, had measured to a hair's-breadth the extent to which she dared venture; now she saw that she had reached the limit.

"Since your Majesty has, as I said, forestalled my request and released me from my duties and my promise, I can find courage to tell her that I have at last consented to"—she paused and looked up with innocent eyes—"to marry Mr. Spencer."

"To marry Mr. Spencer!" repeated the Queen vaguely.

"I fear, Madam," went on the Countess, looking down again, "that both you and His Majesty have

reason to be more than astonished at my venturing to contemplate such a step without previously obtaining your sanction. A thousand times I would have spoken, but your unwonted coldness froze the words on my lips. As for Mr. Spencer, your Majesty knows his peculiar independence." Here a faint smile spread over her face. "His wife could not——"

"Stop! stop!" cried the Queen, seized her by the waist, dragged her to the window, and peered eagerly into her face. "Let me understand you. You, Julia, you are asking me to let you marry—marry—Mr. Spencer?"

Donna Julia kept her lids downcast, with an air of injured candour.

"Mr. Spencer," she murmured, "is jealous of the privacy of home. I trust the King will pardon his defection, but now"—she looked up suddenly, and allowed for the first time her resentment to ring out openly—"now that your Majesty has dismissed me, half my difficulty vanishes."

"Julia! Julia!" exclaimed the Royal lady, and incontinently burst into tears. "I have been mad, forgive me!" She caught the black figure to her arms. "Oh, how happy you have made me!" she cried.

The Countess would have slipped from this embrace and formally kissed hands, but the Queen held her close, and, hiding her own flushed face against the shoulder of her lady-in-waiting, proceeded in muffled tones:

"You say true: you have enemies, you were

calumniated. Oh, never ask me to tell you what they made me believe ! I was mad, and I put faith in slander and malice rather than in the truth of one who had proved her love times without number. Ah, you are offended ! I have deserved it ! ”

She relaxed her grasp and drew back still weeping ; but through her tears her face shone with irrepressible joy.

“ Your Majesty overwhelms me,” said the Gräfin, very coldly. “ It will more than make amends if, when I leave you, I may carry with me still the assurance of your esteem and friendship.”

“ And do you think,” cried the Queen, “ that I can ever allow you to leave me now ? No, less than ever now. We shall invent a post for you that may be compatible with your married life. Mr. Spencer must be made to understand that my claims must be considered as well as his. You would not rob the King of his valuable services.”

“ Your Majesty——”

“ Oh, let it be Theresa once again between us, as in the old sweet days ! ” interrupted the Queen.

“ Your Majesty knows,” repeated Donna Julia relentlessly, “ that I would give her my life, but she asks here for a sacrifice that is beyond my strength ; to remain where once I have been suspected is impossible.”

The Queen’s tears gushed out once more.

“ You must forgive me ! ” she cried, sobbing like a child ; “ you must remain—I beg you to remain ! Julia, I will get the King to ask you himself,” she went on, with the usual revulsion of generous

natures from one extreme to the other. "He at least never offended you! Oh, if I had only listened to him!"

The Countess had pushed her counter attack to the very limits of prudence; the lost position was recovered; it was time to accept the terms of peace so eagerly offered.

"Much as I revere His Majesty," said she, "grateful as I must ever be to the condescension he has invariably shown me, could I yield to him what I refuse my Queen?" She paused, then added with a condescending suavity, "Theresa!"

And they fell into each other's arms.

"Yes, yes, you may retire. You want rest, my poor Julia, and I hold, you know, to your presence at the court to-night when I will myself inform His Majesty of your plans and obtain his consent to your marriage."

The Queen conducted her lady-in-waiting to the door, and Baroness von Melk, sitting in the ante-chamber, was a witness of their parting embrace. The Baroness caught at the same instant a look from Her Majesty over the Countess's shoulders that made her own blood run cold.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Oh, it is very fine talking, Neuberg," said Eva irritably. "I am as frightened as a hare."

Rochester, who sat looking at her abstractedly, saw that the pulse in her round white throat was beating visibly, like that of some frightened animal.

"And where is Spencer?" she asked suddenly.

"My dear, I know no more of him than you do. He is not himself, that is clear."

"Oh, you never do know anything," she retorted sharply.

"But he is sure to come to your supper after the concert," proceeded the officer, in the soothing tone of a nurse to a pettish child.

Eva was sitting full dressed before the looking-glass in her bedroom, putting the last touches to her hair. She was too proud of the flower-like fineness and bloom of her skin to try to enhance it with other red and white. But she pinched and pulled at the little bunch of ringlets on her temples with dissatisfied fingers and held a white camellia at different angles behind her ear, or beside the lowering comb that fastened her hair upon the crown of her head—where the three loops shone in the candle-light with

the colour of a ripe horse-chestnut—and would let it rest nowhere.

Rochester watched the vivid image in the glass, and all the while his thoughts were occupied with the memories of his afternoon visit. But Neuberg was eagerly interested in the position of that camellia, and called out: "Perfect, Eva! Do not touch it again. Ah, now you have it!" at every new essay.

All at once she plucked it out with final spite and threw it at him.

"What a plague you are!" she cried. "And why the hangman did you ever come to this beastly place? That was a happy thought of yours. And you brought him, too! My God! and I had such a light heart in poor old Vienna, and so had he!"

She stood up as she spoke.

"There is the carriage," said she. "Give me my cloak. What sort is this famous Julia?"

She turned abruptly on the Duke.

"Oh," said he, and blushed at being probed to his hidden thoughts. "The Countess de Lucena, do you mean?"

"Of course!" she snapped, and stamped her foot. "I want to know her when I see her, this beautiful Julia."

"Oh," stammered the boy again, "she is very tall, you know, and slight, and all that."

"Ah!" said Eva, and drew the folds of her velvet cloak vengefully over the firm sweep of her bust. "One of your English broomsticks! I can see her from here!"

"Oh, but she is not thin!" cried the Duke, wax-

ing hot at the imputation cast on his country and on his taste. "She is just perfect, like—like a Diana!"

"What do you know about it, I should like to know?" said the singer, whisking off with a sniff; while Neuberg, brushing forward to offer his arm, gave the Duke in passing a vicious dig with his elbow.

"She is older than you, Eva," he said artfully, as they went down the stairs—"a great deal older. And, between ourselves, I do not think she would like anyone to assist at her consultation with the looking-glass."

"Oh, those are the worst," said the poor Prima Donna, sighing. "Don't I know? Well, let them go hang! I have a better sort of art, anyhow."

* * * * *

The music-gallery was all red damask and gilding, after the prevailing pattern of the Palace reception-rooms. It was an apartment of vast size and height, lit by immense cut-glass chandeliers that reflected their own light in myriad hanging drops. This evening, the concert being for the Court circle only, the audience, grouped upon a little island of chairs amid the sea of shining parquet, seemed only to emphasize the emptiness of the great chamber.

Any less splendid, less exuberant personality than Eva's would have been overpowered by the space as she advanced and took up her solitary position on a central platform, her only reinforcement being the perspiring Prziborski, whose red head bobbed in preliminary agony behind the bank of palms that screened the pianoforte. But with free gait she

stepped forward, swept her courtesy to the King's empty chair, and the voluminous pink satin of the Queen's skirts, and then stood for a moment proudly, as if to let them all look and take account of her magnificent presence; because in a little while (she knew it) the magic of her voice would rob them of the power to criticise her beauty.

She shot one look at Spencer, who stood—unmistakable figure in the background—leaning against a pilaster, and, following the direction of his eyes, she let her gaze rest with piercing scrutiny on the cloud of lilac and white behind the Queen, out of which cloud emerged a delicate apparition with shoulders of pearly whiteness, with small, round, long throat and small, tired face, framed by a nimbus of sparkling and indefinitely tinted like motes in a sunbeam. Her rival!

"So there she is," said Eva's heart—"that colourless thing!" And the poor heart gave a leap of scorn and satisfaction. But the next moment it sunk like lead, for the clever brain had sent another message to it. "We have not a chance," it said.

Yet not even Neuberg saw a ruffle on the singer's brow. She was a born actress, and stood in her destined place. She turned her head and signalled to the pianist, who struck the first chords, subdued and caressing. Then up rose Eva's voice.

Here, at least, she was without a peer. But, alas! What of the power of the poet or the artist, when the emotion he evokes flows not back to himself, but ever to the shrine of some hidden idol?

The first song was a solemn chant of Bach ; and Spencer's soul, uplifted by it, floated on its wave, and flung itself at the feet of the woman he loved.

The song was followed by a moment's silence, followed in its turn by a decorous murmur, like the rustle in a field of corn. But the Queen had let fall the word "Exquisite!" and the word was echoed. Those nearest to her saw likewise that there were tears in her eyes. The Royal lady was easily moved to tears that evening, although an unwonted joyfulness became her like a flower.

"I wish His Majesty were here," whispered she over her shoulder to the rehabilitated lady-in-waiting.

"Indeed yes," said the latter ; but her tone was indifferent, and her eye vague.

The next song had been artfully chosen in marked contrast to the first. It was an airy Italian canzonet, as joyous as the note of the lark, as light as the streamlet rippling. Eva had essentially a dramatic genius, and she sang the more gaily, perhaps, that her heart was so heavy.

In the middle of the second verse a man, with flushed face and commanding presence, marched with resounding tread the whole length of the concert-room to the empty chair in front, into which he flung himself.

The whole audience had risen, fluttering, and the modulated thread of the singer's voice was lost in the sounds of scraping chairs and rustling silks. Eva broke off abruptly, silenced her accompanist by a backward glance, lowered her music, crossed her

hands over it, and watched calmly till she caught the King's eye—an eye somewhat bloodshot and sullen to-night—then made him a vast courtesy.

“By heavens,” said the King, and for the first time looked at his wife, “that is the handsomest woman I have seen for a long time !”

The singer began again, and sang her song straight at him.

At the interlude the King, so tenacious usually of the smallest rule of etiquette, gave three sonorous claps, and called out “Bravo !” at which signal a small and unbroken beat of applause rose among the audience.

His Majesty then wheeled round in his chair, and looked searchingly from the Queen's face, flushing and eager, to the Countess's cold, enigmatic countenance.

“If you will allow us, Sire,” said the little Queen, timidly fluttering upon the verge of her happy secret like a bird round its nest, “we should like to make a communication to you to-night, which we venture to hope will not displease you.”

She laid her hand as she spoke upon that of the lady-in-waiting ; the latter bent down and kissed it, and then raised her head and shot past her Royal mistress a swift, deep look into the King's eyes. There was a pause.

“Indeed,” said the King.

It was but a single word, but it was sufficient to mark a complete change of mood. The Queen saw good humour radiate once again from the august brow that made fair and foul weather for all around.

but most of all for her, and her spirits sprang to boldness.

"Then, will your Majesty be pleased to summon Mr. Spencer?" said she, almost coquettishly.

The King glanced again at the Countess's little drooping head and downcast eyes; then he called Neuberg with a look and gave him the order.

Across the long room came Spencer, in his grave, easy way.

"See," said the Queen, "here is an empty seat beside Donna Julia. I have just been telling the King that we have a secret to tell him. Yes, Mr. Spencer, your secret is mine too."

Spencer's face expressed astonishment, bewilderment. He looked hastily at the Countess; she was impassive.

"Your Majesty," proceeded the Queen, in a deep, thrilling voice, "these two have been afraid to tell us—these two, your friends and mine—that they have learned to know and love each other. I think we must not be too hard on them. We must forgive, Sire; for I believe they are worthy of each other. But I have put a condition to my pardon. I believe you will put a similar condition to yours. Let them belong to each other if they will, but they must not cease to belong to us too."

All the woman in her revelled in the scene. She smiled radiantly, but her own eloquence brought the ready tears to her eyes. She watched, palpitating, for her King's reply.

The King first turned upon Spencer a look that might have slain a man; then, reading upon the

page of that countenance nothing but the most guileless surprise, turned again to the closed book of the woman beside him, and reflected for the space of a second. Then the thunder-cloud rolled over and sunshine reigned once more.

"By the Lord, Madam!" said he to the Queen, with mock fierceness, while the blandest humour shone from his eyes, "have we such traitors about us? Mr. Spencer, Countess, is it possible? Well, well, if the Queen has forgiven you, so must I, I suppose. But remember it is on condition—Donna Julia, your hand, and yours, my friend—none but myself shall give you one to the other."

Spencer, who had grown pale, bowed first over the Royal hand and then over the slender fingers that were laid in his grasp.

Meanwhile Eva stood motionless and looked on, cold as a statue.

* * * * *

Under cover of the music whispered the Queen to the King:

"I was wrong, I was wrong; I am so happy to have been wrong. Forgive me!"

Answered the King, with the eye of a Sultan on the Sultana:

"That rose colour suits you well, Theresa."

And she—to flutter and to blush, warmed to the heart with the subtle joy of pardon granted and love restored.

* * * * *

Said Spencer to Donna Julia after a long and heavy silence:

"Did you find no sweetness in our secret, that you must murder it so soon?"

"You said to-day," she answered, "that human affection meant bondage. I believe I then thought myself a free woman—free! . . . I, the Queen's friend!" She laughed bitterly. "God keep us all, and those we love, from the life of courts and the favour of sovereigns!"

The weariness of her eyes, of her voice, of her attitude, was infinite—infinite also the sudden tenderness that leaped into her lover's gaze.

* * * * *

Eva was sent for after the last song, presented to, and complimented by the Royal couple.

"Look at His Majesty's face," whispered one young officer to another. "I prophesy—I prophesy a new star hath risen!"

"His Majesty is learned—in astronomy," answered the other drily; and they both laughed silently.

The Duke, who was standing next to them, overheard, and threw them a dark glance. Thereupon they became preternaturally grave.

* * * * *

The King and the Countess de Lucena were for one moment apart from the rest. The concert was over; the circle was dispersing.

"Desperate cases demand desperate remedies," said the King; "but in God's name, Donna Julia, why Spencer?"

"My King," she answered, in her caressing voice, "some day, when you have the leisure and the con-

descension, I will explain to you the meaning of a cant phrase of ours in England—Hobson's choice."

* * * * *

It was an evening of reconciliation. His Majesty, upon retiring to his room, sent for his Master of the Horse, who, since the episode of the Hungarian mare, had been left out in the cold. The reception was a cordial one. His Majesty was in a jovial mood, and laughed heartily as they conversed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was a dejected trio that met after this Court function in Eva's sitting-room.

"Make my excuses to dear Eva," had said Spencer hurriedly to his friend among the few words they had been able to exchange a little earlier that night; "impossible for me to get away, the Queen has commanded my presence. You have heard the news?" he added with an unconsciously melancholy countenance.

Neuberg had heard the news: whispers at Court spread quickly from ear to ear. But the words of congratulations seemed to halt on his tongue. Spencer, not at all surprised, it appeared, by his friend's silence, turned away, breathing deeply and pulling at his collar with impatient fingers, as if oppressed by a sense of strangulation. The officer stood looking after him and his soul was dark within him. He was full of misgivings for the two people he loved best in the world. However delicious he had thought the idea of Spencer in love, the thought of Spencer bound, Spencer engaged, Spencer married—and married to the Countess de Lucena of all women in the world—was monstrous! Moreover,

it was no pleasant task to be the bearer of this message, knowing all that it meant, to the Prima Donna.

The most susceptible spot in young Rochester's mental anatomy was as yet his vanity. The news of the eccentric, erratic, obscure commoner's engagement to the Countess came as a severe blow upon this most vulnerable place. Like a too self-confident pugilist advancing with cork-like springs to conquest, he found himself all at once with the breath knocked out of his body, in the most undignified attitude, dizzy with his fall.

It was certainly not with the object of making himself a pleasant addition to Eva's little party that he presented himself at her apartment that night, but rather from the unamiable, if thoroughly human, instinct of venting his ill-humour upon someone.

Eva herself, flushed, concentrated and brooding, was soon like the Eva of their acquaintance, loquacious and energetic, whether in joy or grief, that neither of her guests quite knew which way now to approach her.

They took their seats at her bidding, and the fourth chair stood empty, a reproachful skeleton at the feast. Neuberg cast many an uneasy glance in its direction, and cleared his throat for action several times. But each time he felt unable to find words delicate enough to deal with the unpleasant topic.

Eva suddenly looked at him and broke into a harsh laugh; then, turning to the buxom maid who was placing some dishes upon the table: "Take away that chair," said she; "Mr. Spencer will not

come to-night." Then she laughed again, but no more genially, at the officer's astonished countenance. "Do you think I have no eyes in my head," she went on, "and that because I was singing I could not use them? My goodness! were not Spencer and his fine lady right under my nose half the evening? Well, she will be a match for him! Heaven help him! You are all mad, I think, to permit such a thing; it is a crime!"

"Eva, Eva, Eva!" ejaculated Neuberg in a tone through which pity, entreaty, rebuke, and sympathy were intertwined as the strands of a rope.

"Well," said the Duke, elaborately sarcastic, and cutting a slice of brawn with murderous precision, "however that may be, one can hardly say that the Countess has found *her* match."

"Eh!" said Eva, turning upon him bodily with a portentous sweep, "and what might you mean by that?"

Neuberg was glad enough of the opportunity to relieve his overcharged feelings.

"Hold your tongue, you young fool!" he growled.

Rochester threw up his head fiercely; his eyes shone fresh duels and re-sharpened swords.

"Count Neuberg——" began he, but Eva, with loud emphasis and voluble speech, bore down the boding quarrel.

"You be quiet!" she cried, and rapped her younger guest over the finger with the handle of her fork. "Hush! hush! not a word more. What is the meaning of this? Does the child intend to defy his nurse? Hoity toity! As for you, Neuberg, leave

him alone: the lad is quite right; Spencer is no match for her. Alas, my poor Spencer! It is the lion with the serpent. He will draw her beauty to the warmth of his great heart, and she will luxuriate in it and coil herself round it; and one day she will turn upon him, strike, and glide away, and leave him with the dead poison in his blood. My God! do I not know the species? It is not so uncommon, I assure you, as you think, my poor young friend, and we honest women—we have not a chance against them, not one. Your Lucena is pretty enough, I grant you, in her skinny way, and she is a fine lady, a great lady, and all the rest of it. But, mark you, it is not the beauty that does it, it is not the rank, and not the cleverness—it is just the devil in them! Ah, they know exactly where to have you, you men! They have but to give the best of you a glint with the tail of their eye, and off you go trotting, like so many little dogs. And you, who won't let your wives or your sweethearts or your sisters so much as call their soul their own, you will dance your whole set of tricks for whatever such a one is pleased to throw you, and not care if you are one of twenty."

"My dear Eva!" said Neuberg; then he added constrainedly, looking down at the tablecloth. "There has never been a breath against the Countess."

"No, my son," said Eva, "because she has the genius of her art. My goodness! how blind you people are! Well, some day you will remember what I say."

"But surely," said Rochester, "Mr. Spencer, of

whom you all have so high an opinion, is not the kind of man——”

“No, no,” interrupted Eva, “I do not include him among the lapdogs; did I not say he was the lion? As for you two,” she went on more composedly, “this poor faithful mastiff here knows but one mistress, and will follow her in his blind, stupid way till she plucks up heart to drive him off or starve him out.”

She smiled as she spoke, an adorable tender smile that lit up the gloom of all their spirits like a burst of sunshine through clouds; and, smiling, she stretched out her hand and laid it over Neuberg's, who, enthralled beyond words to express himself, bent his head and kissed it, stammering:

“If you would; ah, if you would!”

“As for you, my lord,” proceeded Eva, allowing her hand to linger in her lover's grasp, and turning her head to the Duke, “you are just the kind of little dog that will wag his tail and do pretty tricks for *any* kind lady that has nice little cakes to give. But I do think, I will say this much for you, that you would bite at the heels and snap at the nose of any other little dog that was forward enough to want to share in the treat.”

“You are very kind,” said Rochester, and was for the space of a minute in a state of deadly offence, balancing between two minds, whether to rebuke his hostess in dignified words or to cast his napkin aside and stalk in silence from the room. But, unable to rise to the full height required by the situation, he merely sat and sulked.

"A match for her!" cried Eva, pursuing the thread of her absorbing thoughts; "no, she will not find her match here, unless"—she paused and snatched her hand away—"unless it is the King."

Shaken out of his ill-humour by this extraordinary statement, Rochester glanced up to intercept a startled look on Neuberg's countenance.

"Upon my word," said she, relapsing into actual despondency—"upon my word, I do not blame her. Why should she not take the best that life can give her in her own way? It does not pay to have an over-delicate conscience in this world. Now, here am I; I have kept myself straight and honest through everything—kept myself worthy of a good man's love . . . and what have I got? A careless, kind look, a passing thought. Poor Eva! A beggar in the street would get as much. While she—Oh, I'm sick of it all! What is the use of my being good as well as handsome? Half the people I know do not believe in it, and the other half think: What a fool!" She broke into a harsh, jarring laugh. "A fool! that is what I have been—that is what I am! Well, it is not too late yet to be wise."

She got up as she spoke, straightened her figure, and threw out her arms. Neuberg leaped up, too, in a sort of terror, and caught her to him as if to protect her.

"For Heaven's sake!" he cried.

"Oh," said she, "if I am a fool, what a fool are you, my poor friend!"

Then she pettishly disengaged herself from his grasp and took two or three steps up and down the

room with an assumed air of jauntiness that sat very ill upon her frank simplicity.

"Did I not sing very well?" she asked. "I think I created a most favourable impression. Your King is a fine-looking man, Gustaf."

Neuberg first laughed at this childish taunt; the next instant he looked grave, opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again dumbly.

At that moment there was a knock at the door, and Trüdchen, entering, gaspingly announced that a gentleman officer—a very fine officer—requested a few moments private interview with the Fräulein Visconti.

"A private interview!" ejaculated Neuberg, in a towering rage, before Eva had time to respond—"a private interview! What devil's impudence is this? Send him back to his brimstone home—or, stay, have him shown up here. What can the scoundrel have to say to you in private, I should like to know! No, better still, I will go down and see to this myself!"

Fuming, he reached for his sword-belt, but Eva waved him aside.

"Ta-ta-ta-ta! you give your orders very freely in my house, young man: a little more modesty, if you please. Pray, are you the only fine officer I am to admit to private interviews?"

She turned to Trüdchen hereupon and bade her admit the gentleman to the little parlour downstairs whither she would immediately herself follow.

"Eva! Eva!" remonstrated her lover, with something between a whine and a growl.

But she, with an air of the most profound indifference, settled her curls before the glass, twitched her laces, smoothed her skirts, and sailed majestically from the room.

"Now, you be quiet!" she cried sharply over her shoulder as her quick ear caught Neuberg's surreptitious tread behind her, and she slammed the door in his face.

"Devil's brew!" said Neuberg, and ground his heel.

The Duke stared; he was beginning to forget his own grievances in the interest of the drama that was being played around him.

Neuberg went to the door, set it ajar and stood listening intently, his hand upon his sword. All was silence in the house—silence singular and suspicious.

Absently gazing at each other, the two men waited, every nerve on the stretch, while Eva's little clock ticked out an interminable quarter of an hour. At last there was the noise of opening doors below, of clanking heels, the slam of the house door; then the rustle of Eva's skirts and her step slow upon the stairs.

With an unconsciously comical glance at his friend, Neuberg retreated on tiptoe to his chair. Both watched eagerly for the singer's entrance.

She came in with the same lagging step, wrapped as in a mantle of profound reflection. In her hand she held a magnificent bouquet of exotic flowers.

Neuberg's quick jealousy was once more all aflame.

He clenched his hands to keep them from snatching the gift from her grasp.

"Who is it? What did he want?"

Eva looked at him for a moment without speaking; then she looked down at her flowers and pulled the leaves with the tips of her fingers.

"Did I not tell you," she said, "that I had a success this evening?" but her voice had not its usual frank ring.

"Who is it?" repeated Neuberg, coming close up to her.

Rochester saw that he was trembling, that his handsome gay countenance had grown quite livid.

She faced him with a sudden quick movement; their eyes were nearly on a level.

"I never gave you, that I know of, the right to question me. Pray, may I not have admirers as well as other people? Oh, I have got one worth having this time!" She laughed bitterly. "It is as I said: I am sick of being good; I am going to enjoy myself!"

With a sudden savagely abrupt movement she snatched from the bosom of her low dress a handful of jewels—jewels that flashed and sparkled, a living stream of green fire, in her fingers—and flung them on the table amid the homely viands.

With starting eyeballs Neuberg glared at them, but to his fury words refused themselves. The Duke came up to her, small, cool, self-possessed, and took her hand.

"My kind nurse," he said, "you do not mean this."

He looked at her with grandfatherly seriousness ; then he picked the rivi re of emeralds off the ham, the bracelet from the salt-cellar, and wiped them daintily with his napkin. " You will promise us to return these presents to their donor."

Before he had finished speaking, Neuberg clutched them from him, looked at them keenly, and then at the woman.

" You know what these are worth," he said, in an ominously quiet voice. " There is only one man in this town could make such presents. Eva, you don't know what you are doing. I will restore them."

Eva turned from one to the other of the earnest brave young faces and her lips trembled for a moment ; then she held out her hand.

" Those are mine," she said doggedly ; " restore them to me, if you please."

Without a word Neuberg handed them to her. She clasped the necklace round her throat, and the bracelet round her wrist.

" They become, do they not," said she, " my bronze hair ? "

" I never thought," said Neuberg, in a harsh voice, " that you could look ugly, Eva, but with these things upon you—oh, heavens, you are hideous ! Come, Rochester, let us go."

" Oh, go, go ! " cried the woman, breaking into sudden ill-temper. " And a pleasant pair you have been, and a pleasant supper we have had together ! "

Neuberg, pale as death, made her a formal bow. At the door she called him back tauntingly.

" So I am hideous," she said. " Look again,

Neuberg—look again ! Do they not become me ? Are they not a right royal gift ? ”

Neuberg pushed the Englishman violently out before him ; they fled clattering down the stairs. But in the street he suddenly halted and flung himself against the wall of the house with a groan.

“ And to think,” said he, “ that she would never take from me anything more lasting than a flower ! ”

“ She is not herself,” said the Duke consolingly.

“ No,” said Neuberg ; “ and that is the danger. If she were but to her own self true, all would be well ; but in this mood and with such a man——”

“ Is it really the King ? ” whispered the Duke, awestruck.

The officer’s only answer was a glance of despair and a gesture indicating his own epaulettes. Then fury again convulsed him.

“ I would tear them from me,” he said, after a pause, in a strangled voice ; “ but, though they bind my tongue and hands, yet they alone give me freedom to remain near her.”

“ Oh, cheer up, old fellow ! are there not two of us ? It will be all right, you will see,” cried Rochester, deeply moved and, in his inability to express his feelings, relapsing into schoolboy awkwardness. But inwardly he was making a mighty and a manly resolve, and felt the soreness of his own aching heart sensibly assuaged thereby.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SPENCER was pacing up and down the room in loose slippers. He alternately puffed at and waved his long meerschaum pipe, blissfully unconscious of its extinction. At every turn he made a little halt and his eyes sought, and rested for a few seconds upon, the little cup of delicate yellow Sèvres china for which a space had been cleared on his mantelshelf. Neuberg sat, moodily hunched up in the leather armchair, his elbows on his knees; his profile, lit by the ray of the reading-lamp, was twisted into bitter lines; his eyes glowered into space. It was a most unwonted attitude for the smart and buoyant Life-Guardsman.

Tingling in every nerve from the rapidity and passion of emotional life into which, from the sluggish stream of his previous existence, he now found himself flung as into a whirlpool of unknown depth and force, young Rochester, with a flush on each pale cheek, sat on one of the little hard cane chairs, sadly listening to his two friends.

At times he shunned their company; the presence of Spencer was as a blister to his sensibility; the name of Julia from those lips, the happy smile,

the tender silence of the favoured lover—all this was more than he could endure. And at such moments he would plunge alone into the open country to confide his sorrows to the fields and skies, or dream in the heart of some scented dell dear impossible dreams, as sweet and single-minded and foolishly young as April itself. But at other times he would feel that to be alone with his own unrest was the one thing unbearable; that to hear all that he could hear of her, to study every phase of this courtship, which seemed to him every day more inexplicable and more unsuitable, had become a necessity, horrible but stringent.

And though the Countess rode daily with her lover—on Zuleika, his gift—daily also did Rochester see her, too, if only for a minute, and never without carrying away with him a little more oil for the foolish, starveling flame in his heart.

“The man who has not known love,” said the Philosopher, taking up the thread of his discourse after a rapturous pause of contemplation, “has never known life. He is the blind man who has never seen colour nor form, light nor shade; the deaf man whose sealed ears have gathered no sound but the dull booming of his own arteries, the man to whom the thunder of God or the nightingale’s voice have alike no meaning. He is as the dumb who has never spoken to his kind. Nay, he is as the dead—worse than the dead, for his inert flesh has never harboured anything but an unvivified soul.”

Neuberg turned his moody eyes upon the speaker.

"Well, I never thought I should live to hear your drivél, Michael," growled he.

Spencer, from the further end of the room, turned his head, smiling :

"My gentle Proteus, Love's a mighty lord, and hath so humbled me.' "

"I thought," pursued Neuberg, unmollified, "that you, at least, amid the general lunacy that seems to have come over us all, would have kept your sanity, but you are as bad as the rest. You have given that woman everything : your liberty, your individuality, your time, your wits, your horse, yourself ! It is madness ! "

"Madness ! " echoed his friend, who inhaled and expelled an imaginary puff of tobacco-smoke from his lips, and again waved his pipe ; "time was indeed when I was mad. But now I am sane—sane at last ! 'Now no discourse except it be of love,' now 'can I break my fasts, dine, sup and sleep upon the very naked name of love ! ' "

"Bah ! " cried the other, with an angry snort, and looked sharply away as if the sight of the Philosopher's illumined countenance were more than he could bear.

The Philosopher, however, airily resumed his walk. His step was springy, and the skirt of his dressing-gown floated as he went.

A pause fell, and the night sounds seemed to grow louder from without. A dog bayed, a cock crew ; then the church clocks far and near proclaimed a quarter.

"Can it be," cried Neuberg, with a sudden burst

of furious irritation, beating his knee with his hand, "that the best and the wisest are thus turned in an hour into toys for the sport of the most capricious, the most wanton? What are you now, Michael, but an air-balloon floating on the breath of a woman's lips? What is Eva? . . . What—what is this love that can so rule and ruin us?"

"I will tell you," said Mr. Spencer, halting before his friend and smiling upon him, a vast, benign figure, from his unlifted height. "It is the spring-time of our human life, carissimo. To some it comes early, to some it comes late; to some in all haste, the passion of an hour; to some with slow, gradual, beautiful development. To some it comes not at all. But those are the base, or the too unfortunate, and those we will leave out of reckoning. With the spring all Nature awakes, life courses through her, the earth is quickened, sap flows back to the dried twigs, tender and lovely flowers break on the black sod, bare places are clothed with green, the silent birds gather voice, the new hearts beat in the shell, the imprisoned streams rush forth. That is Spring! and that is Love! But you have felt it, Gustaf—you do not need my word."

Rochester saw Neuberg's lips writhe in a sarcastic smile.

"A very powerful frost has nipped my little season in the bud," said the officer. "And do you call yours and the Gräfin de Lucena's passion for each other spring, my good friend? There is a kind of torrid heat about you two that rather disturbs the simile."

"Well, I will find another for you—a hundred, if you like." Spencer laughed gently as he spoke: "Love is the sun of life that turns all that it touches to beauty; the bit of broken glass in the gutter into a flashing jewel, the empty straw into a bar of gold, the whitewashed attic into a palace chamber, men's sorrowful and stormy pilgrimage on this earth into a long dream of paradise, the common round of life, the small daily task, into something precious, something full of wonder. You see that cup? She gave it me. What is it? A mere eggshell bit of clay. For me it beams like a star; it speaks a thousand tongues; it speaks of her. A draught from it——"

Here Neuberg interrupted him ruthlessly, and harping back to the first part of his friend's sentence, "Oh, fatal simile!" cried he, between a laugh and a groan—"a bit of glass into a diamond, a brittle straw into a bar of gold. Oh, my friend, have I built with straw? Have you picked up the mock jewel?"

Spencer looked at him for a moment with a startled eye, then he broke again into his tolerant, amused laugh.

"Well," said he, "let us call love by what name you will, it is yet the spark that divinises poor humanity, the motor spring of its best energies. It is love of his Creator that uplifts the saint; it is love of his fellow man that makes the philanthropist; love for his country, the hero; love of his people, the ruler. But it is love between man and woman alone, that divine double selfishness, that makes

happiness, and it is happiness keeps the world from chaos."

"I never thought, either," said Neuberg, "that I should live to see you selfish. You had not a minute to spare from your happiness all these days. All the claims of the old friend could not drag you from the side of the new love. Oh, for God's sake! be your own old self but for half an hour, and let us talk sense. Everything is going wrong, Michael: Eva is in danger—that Sachs was there again to-day, and she and I have quarrelled. She has forbidden me her door. And I must be dumb"—he struck his mouth fiercely—"dumb even to you!"

Spencer deposited his pipe on the table and seemed momentarily surprised to find it cold; then he came over to Neuberg and laid his hand upon his shoulders. His voice, expression, bearing, were all altered.

"Believe me, Gustaf," said he, "did I apprehend what you do, I would instantly take steps to interfere. You know what little store I set by that tinsel decoration, Royal favour; nevertheless, were it as precious to me as it is to most men, I should not hesitate a moment. But you are wrong. Let Eva talk, let her play, at recklessness, at heart she is too sound, in temper she is too proud, her head is too clear—she will never fail. As for the King, I have had time to diagnose his character; in spite of many faults, he is an honourable man. He has noble qualities. You are his friend as well as his servant; he knows of your love for Eva—need I say more?"

Neuberg lifted upon him a dull and hopeless eye.

"No, you need say no more," he answered in a tone of muffled resentment. He stood up as he spoke, stiffened himself, buckled on his sword, then suddenly turned upon Spencer with another gust of passion. "Well, shall I tell you," said he, "what love is? It is part of the curse of our fallen race; it is the bait put into the hands of the devil, who, we are taught, roams the earth unseen to trap us into fury and madness, into crime and despair. It is the Dead Sea fruit, fair to the eye, ash on the lips; it is the mother of jealousy, and envy, and dissension, of treachery, hypocrisy, hatred, murder." His voice, always harsh in excitement, grew more and more rasping as he spat each bitter word louder and louder at his friend. "Love . . . it is what kindles the flames of hell in our souls and keeps the place warm for us below. It has made my sweet Eva a tortured, reckless woman; it makes you, *you*, a callous, self-absorbed, unfeeling man; it makes . . . it makes Rochester there an insufferable popinjay! It is making me—what I am to-night!"

He stamped his foot, seized his cap, and dashed out of the room, slamming the door behind him. The clank of his spurs rang into the silence of the house and rose again in fury up to the open window, from the street below, to die away into the night.

Spencer had made no attempt to arrest him, and stood listening with bent head. Rochester had grown quite white.

"Poor fellow!" said the Philosopher at last, "it goes hard with him. But between him and Eva no man, least of all myself, may dare slip a finger now. They must fight their own battle. Yet, mark you, young man," he went on, falling back into his didactic manner, "he is doing Eva a grave injustice in his fears. There is just one thing she will never do——"

"There are rumours at the Court already, nevertheless," interrupted Rochester, in a low voice.

"Rumours!" echoed Spencer scornfully. Then, after a reflecting pause: "Poor child! It is a cruel world. All alone. She must not be exposed to that if it can be helped. And here a man's word is worse than useless—remember that, Duke; an incautious defence of a woman by a man is sometimes the remedy that is worse in the end than the disease. But a woman, a woman's tact, a look, a single word, can silence evil tongues. I will see to it."

Rochester rose to leave. He felt, with the inexperience of youth, suddenly brought to face the sordid part of life, disgusted with it, and indignant at the toleration of others, and moreover he was as unconvinced as Neuberg himself. His sympathies, too, were all with the latter. It was Spencer's incongruous engagement to the Countess that had started the wheel of misfortune, and his own pride was still smarting.

"I hope you are right, Mr. Spencer," said he; "but no one knows of what folly a woman may be capable."

He shook his head with the hoary wisdom of his years and with some formality took his departure.

Spencer laughed to himself when the door closed. "These April bloods!" thought he—"these pushing shoots who deem their immature buds to be the finished fruits of earth!"

He ran his hands through his hair, and sighed luxuriously to find himself alone. The most gregarious of humans, he was at the same time the most complacent of his own solitary good company. He glanced round reflectively at his writing-desk, at his books, and hesitated. Then his eye fell upon the little cup, and grew brooding. He reached for his pipe, filled it, gravitated towards his armchair, and, cross-legged, began to smoke and to muse, still gazing at the cup.

His thoughts from his happy garret floated over the sleeping town, passed the guard of the palace, reached an amber-veiled room, the scented casket where rested his beloved. Lying like a lily just mown, straight and stately and pure, he saw her sleeping in the soft light.

* * * * *

Amid gossamer sheets and laces, satin hangings and down pillows, the woman lay, staring with fevered eyes far into the watches of the night, her brain working yearningly, yet angrily, round an unsolvable problem.

* * * * *

When Spencer's pipe went out and his lamp had

burnt low, he got up to seek his rest ; but he took with him the cup from the shelf and placed it on the sill of his uncurtained window, where the first rays of the rising sun would strike its yellow cheek.

CHAPTER XXX.

OF set purpose, Rochester had thrown himself a good deal into Court circles during these latter days. He had that afternoon held short but vivacious converse with a certain mercurial young gentleman of the Queen's household, one Ernst von Mantefel, and in the course of a few minutes had had his mind considerably opened to the mysteries of Palace life.

The talk first fell upon his own beautiful country-woman; and the Duke, unable to arrest his companion's tongue, felt every chivalrous instinct within him rise against the malice that sought to blast by sheer innuendo the fair name of a solitary woman, against whom it was evident no positive allegation could be made.

A Diana, said the scandal-monger—a positive Diana. Chastity personified? Certainly. People said that in Florence it was a case of safety in numbers. He! he! A follower of St. Paul's counsel, you know—all things to all men. But that was mere gossip—irresponsible gossip; he did not believe it. The Queen's friend—that was enough. The fair Julia did seem to have been moving under

a cloud lately ; Her Majesty was supposed to have withdrawn her countenance. Why, no one quite ventured to put into words . . .

"I should think not," said Rochester discouragingly. "The invention of some empty fool."

"Quite so," agreed Manteufel heartily. "Whether," added he, shrugging his shoulders, "old Melk grubbed up anything about the past or present I do not know. She was always deadly jealous of the Gräfin. People say that on the very day of these extraordinary betrothals—with Mr. Spencer, you know—she insulted the Gräfin Lucena so disgracefully that the latter, just as she was going in to the Queen, broke her fan across her face. Anyhow, Melk's nose bled ; and as Donna Julia was all in favour again, Her Majesty told old Melk that she was evidently not in a proper state of health to attend to her duties, and sent her home to recruit—he ! he ! A good riddance for us all !"

Here he looked cautiously around him, edged a step closer to the Duke, and whispered behind his hand :

"Have you noticed the Gräfin's *jager* ? Some people say that he could explain a good deal."

"Herr von Manteufel," cried Rochester, starting, "I do not understand you, and— Hush, I don't want to."

Manteufel's innocent pink countenance bore the impress of the most intense astonishment for a second ; then he nodded good-humouredly.

"Quite right, my lord," said he, and stepped back. "Not fair—not fair at all, I am quite of your opinion."

Ah, Mr. Spencer is a lucky fellow. *Potzblitz!* we would all give our ears to stand in his boots. Extraordinary man! Have you known him long?—ever heard of him in England? Ah! I thought not. They do not want him over there. Mystery, you know—mystery! They say he came with letters from your King. Gay dog in his youth, eh, your King George? Positively, my dear lord”—here he edged a step nearer, and his voice sank—“I have seen a portrait of George of England in his youth—the image, the very image of our friend! Why, I heard His Majesty call him cousin myself! Extraordinary person, anyhow. The power of mesmerism—oh, have you not heard? The poor Gräfin was quite in his power—had no idea of what happened. But His Majesty insists on the marriage; so does the Queen. They quite exonerate her, you understand, so large-minded they are.”

“Really, Herr von Manteufel,” interrupted the Duke, “you forget that Mr. Spencer is a friend of mine, and that I am in a position to contradict any such wanton absurdity!”

“Absurdity?” replied the buoyant little gentleman, quite unabashed; “my dear Duke, that is the very word—I used it myself! But, indeed, it was no other person than his bosom friend, Count Neuberger, who spread that story of the Professor’s mesmeric gift. Mesmeric! Pooh! He has not the eye for it, my lord, nor the power. But, then, we all know that dear Neuberger is such a simpleton—the laughing stock, sir, the laughing stock of the Court. I ask you, you as a man of the world . . . there is a

fellow who has been six months our King's Equerry, and never rests till he can bring his mistress under the Royal eye. Six months with His Majesty, and as good as throws his fair one into the Royal arms. And mind you, my lord, the fool loves her. It is not as if he wanted to get rid of her ! ”

Rochester with a black look laid his hand on the speaker's arm. It was a light touch, but it imposed silence.

“ May I ask,” said he, in ominously quiet tones, “ to whom you refer, when you speak of my friend Count Neuberg's mistress ? ”

“ You English, ah, you English ! ” cackled the other, after a second's pause. “ Is it possible thus to look over what is actually under your nose ! Why, the Visconti, the singer, the beauty ! She has been his mistress for years. He ! he ! Postilion you did drive her a little way off the road, though ; we know that—shocking, shocking ! *Mais on en revient tous-jours.* . . . Eh ! Well, upon my soul, you have both good taste—and good luck. But so has His Majesty, mind you. Have you heard ? ” Here the hand went up again, and the discreet whisper recommenced. “ Have you heard that the very night of the concert—the very night, sir—oh, I have it from the page of the Bedchamber—His Majesty was closeted with Herr von Sachs, who sallied forth into our good town with the most blatant air of mystery ? Ah, ha, we all know when the Centaur is playing Mercury—he is about as fit for it as a wild boar to dance the minuet ; perhaps there are others more fit, and one day His Majesty may cast his eye around

him with clearer vision . . . but *passons*. Well, as I was saying, Sachs sallied forth mysteriously wrapped in his cloak ; he was carrying a casket, and in that casket a certain set of emeralds as large as nuts. I know all about them—I have seen them . . . but that is too long a story. I will tell it you another time. Now it seems that the Visconti's maid has been bragging in the market-place of the lovely green stones her mistress has been given. I say nothing ; deduce for yourself. But if we do not find His Majesty making a little tour soon to his hunting-box—just to ascertain the prospects of sport, you understand—and if the Visconti is not suddenly indisposed about the same time—singers call such occurrences sore throats, I believe—I should be greatly surprised, greatly.”

“ Pah ! ” said the Duke. They were strolling up and down the terrace. He spat upon the path, took out his embroidered handkerchief, and wiped his lips with a grimace of disgust. (Manteufel thought the action rather vulgar for an English Duke.) Then he suddenly turned on his companion.

“ Have you been long at Court yourself, Herr von Manteufel ? ”

Herr von Manteufel was slightly embarrassed, but, pushed by a compelling eye, admitted six weeks.

“ So long ! ” said the Duke ; “ you surprise me ! ”

He stood for a moment contemplating reflectively the simpering countenance before him, the owner of which was convinced that he had made himself fascinating and entertaining to the last degree.

The young Englishman itched to bring his open

palm in sounding contact with that smooth cheek, but there were a thousand good reasons against the gratification of so purely selfish an impulse. He had sought the little scandalmonger for the purpose of keeping himself informed of the Court gossip, and not only might a duel put him out of favour in Court, but it would bring Eva's name into undeserved notoriety. And towards her, according to his tacit vow, and with the undoubting complacency of youth, he was now determined to act the part of guardian angel. He bowed, therefore, and took his leave of Herr von Manteufel with sarcastic politeness.

His brow was heavily clouded with a sense of care and importance as he walked away. Irresponsible as was the information imparted by his new acquaintance, he had heard enough from other and sufficiently reliable quarters to make him realise how dangerous a rival the King was likely to prove to any man. He was moved to call upon Eva immediately, and to speak words of wisdom to her; but this laudable intention was frustrated by the embargo the singer had laid upon her door :

"The Fraülein is at home to no one."

His Grace's feelings were exceedingly ruffled; he now felt inclined to wash his hands loftily of the whole concern. This was what came, he told himself, of mixing with the classes. Manteufel was right on one point at any rate—Neuberg was a fool!

A little later in the day, however, he discovered that Eva's prohibition had had nothing invidious in it, had been by no means directed against him, but

was, in fact, a measure of which, in the circumstances, he could not but approve.

* * * * *

Neuberg, with the first look of satisfaction his face had worn during the last three days, showed Rochester a letter when they met that evening before supper.

"I received it," he said, "a few minutes ago. I shall sleep to-night."

Rochester took it; it was in Eva's vehement scrawl.

"Neuberg," it ran, "you are a fool and a bore. If you come knocking at my lodging any more, I shall obtain an order of arrest against you, as a public nuisance. Good Gracious! what are you made of? and what do you think I am made of? Yes, sir, this is the question: What do you think I am made of? Oh, I am very angry! How dare you! But never mind that now. Do you forget that my *début* at the opera is to-morrow night, and that, with all these agitations, I shall have no more voice than a raven? Till to-morrow night, then, I close my doors to *everyone*" (this was heavily underlined), "but you may come and assist at my triumph if you like, you three, and bring bouquets as large as yourselves, and afterwards you may all come to my rooms and be forgiven. Tell the others; we shall have one more jolly night, at least.

"EVA."

Rochester read and folded the letter, and handed

it gravely back. Then he, too, sighed a sigh of relief.

"I can tell you something," he said importantly :
"Sachs went three times to Eva's lodgings to-day, was refused admittance twice, and the last time left a letter. He was as yellow as his own saddle-leather. It is the talk of the Court, and the King—"

"And His Majesty?" said the officer, with a look that at once seemed to forbid and invite confidence.

"Well, His Majesty, it would seem, was not in the best of humours."

"By heavens, Spencer was right!" cried Neuberger—"right as usual! I ought to have known my Eva better. What! did I not tell you she was as true as steel! Fool that I was to forget it!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THIS was an April night that wore the smile of June. Hardly a breath stirred the young-leaved trees; the fields of heaven bloomed with innumerable stars, and, this being the season when the fields of earth first send forth the myriad blossoms of which summer robs the year, the breath of the whole sleeping world was as sweet as that of a flower-garden.

Young Rochester found himself wandering in the Palace pleasure-grounds. Neuberg, in his restless passion, had been poor company that evening. Spencer, according to an almost daily custom, was dining with his betrothed. Thrown upon his own resources, drawn by the cord of love which becomes of such irresistible strength when interwoven with the strands of jealousy, the boy had come to eat out his heart in bitterness and silence upon the spot where through parted curtains the light of Madame de Lucena's rooms streamed forth amber into the night.

Once more he set himself the vain task; again he tried to solve the enigma of this woman. How had she come to contemplate a misalliance—she, descendant of so proud a line? If she had succumbed,

heart and soul, to the power which even he unwillingly and unsympathisingly felt at times so strong, if it were that she loved Spencer, how came it then that she could gaze upon another with such mysterious kindness in her eyes? How came it that she should cloud over at any allusion to her forthcoming marriage? And why did she allow him, Rochester, to look at her as he had dared to look—to say to her what he had at last dared to say? Why should she encourage him to come to her, well knowing what was in his heart?

To-day, when he had kissed her hand on leaving, had he not said, "In three days I must go back to England. . . . It will be like going from life to death, to leave you"? And had she not answered, looking at him wistfully and sighing, "Back to England! Would, homing swallow, that you could take me on your wings!" Why had he not asked her then what she had meant by that sigh, that look, those words?

What a Duchess she would have made! thought the boy. With such a star by his side, what an entrance for the new Duke of Rochester upon the world! Past and future, not to speak of rapturous present, would be all golden in such a light. And between him and this vision stood—what? Shabby, eccentric, unknown, Spencer, with his theories, his impulses, his pipe, and his babouches! . . . The incongruity would be laughable were it not tragic.

So Rochester tramped the tender sod, gray in the starlight, and brushed against lilac-branches and syringa, each waft of perfume adding, as he inhaled

it, a poignancy to his longings. All the world so beautiful, the spring so sweet, and he not to have his desire !

The long window of the Countess's drawing-room was thrown open, and, passing through the wide shaft of light, she and Spencer came forth upon the terrace. The Duke, fearful of discovery before the Philosopher's eyes, withdrew into the shadow of a busy arbour, where the honeysuckle was beginning to wind its perfumed horns, and there stood still and, with a fluttering heart, listened.

"What a lovely night !" said Donna Julia. Her voice, in its pretty, precise English, fell with the most absolute harmony on the universal silence. "Oh, Spencer, look at the stars !"

They leant over the marble balustrade, and Rochester thought that Spencer held his arm round her waist.

"The floor of Heaven

Is thick inlaid with patines of pure gold ;
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still choiring to the young-eyed Cherubim."

This came in Spencer's voice, vibrating with that tenderness which none but the woman loved has the power to evoke in a man—which none other has the right to listen to. "Yes, the heavens are beautiful, Julia, and many times have I spent the hours of the night in watching the gathering and waning of those stars, until each flame from the depth of unknown space assumed a separate meaning, an individual expression, and uplifted me in such close

communing, that what Shakespeare calls the 'muddy vesture of decay' seemed to fall away, and I dreamed I heard the music of the spheres. But to-night, to-night, my heaven lies closer to me! The stars never have discoursed such harmony to me as your lips, and I do not envy the young-eyed Cherubim when I may gather all the music of Paradise into my soul thus."

As he spoke there fell a long silence, and then her voice rose again :

"And is it so, really, my Philosopher? Have I given *you* heaven for a moment—even for a moment the realisation of your dreams?"

"More!" cried the man, in a tone that passion had altered beyond recognition. "A thousand times more! I never dreamt such happiness as this!"

"Oh, then," she said, and her voice shook, "as you are a wise man, be content with the thing of perfection and do not ask the impossible."

"What is the impossible?" said he, wonderingly.

"It is," said she, and hesitated, "to press the vine, and yet think to keep the bloom on the grape. It is to try and bind an April hour, to gather the flower and yet want to harvest the fruit. Oh, Spencer, let us be wise; let us only take of life what it can give beautifully!"

"I ask of life but one thing," he interrupted, "and that is you. And, having you, I shall have the very centre and treasure of life's beauty."

"And what of age?" she said; "and what of sickness, and temper, and fatigue? And what of the dreariness of habit—"

"Blasphemy!" interrupted he fiercely, and caught her in his arms.

It was with a little sigh that she spoke again:

"Why then, most unphilosophic philosopher, good-night!"

"Good-night," he answered, and left her, and then came back, running, to bid her good-night again.

Rochester heard his footsteps die away in the distance, and knew that the Countess remained leaning against the balustrade and that she was gazing into the night. He heard her sigh several times as though she felt oppressed. But he had no wish to seek her out, separated from him as she seemed by Spencer's kisses. His heart was so heavy within him and so sore withal, that he cast himself full length upon the bench, like one over-weighted with the burden of life, and there lay staring upwards at the sapphire vault; the message of the stars to him brought no peace.

* * * * *

Now and again a breath of the breeze, like a faint sigh from the sleeping earth, shivered among the branches around him. Some of last year's leaves snapped on their dry stems; a bird piped in its sleep. These were the sounds of silence, and the silence brooded over Rochester for what seemed a long time. Then the blank page of this night's stillness was marked by the print of steps that fell lightly as last year's leaves; the air trembled to a rustle of robes no louder than the whisper of the breeze, and the youth felt in every fibre of his being that she was approaching. Down the steps he heard her come,

and across the sward, and there pace to and fro slowly, lithely restlessly breaking now a bough of syringa, now a spire of lilac ; and he heard her beat the flowers softly against her bare palm, as one deep in reflection. Then, all at once, the rustling drew nearer to his arbour ; there was a pause ; the dry honeysuckle branches snapped as she pulled them aside, and the bush at his head shook with a gust of sweetness. The boy held his breath ; his heart almost stopped beating. He felt that she was standing close by him, looking down ; but in the conflict of emotions, not daring to rise and speak to her, afraid to appear in her eyes as eavesdropper and spy, he knew not what better cloak to assume whereby to hide his confusion than the feint of sleep.

Like a scented cloud, she came between him and the stars. Through his closed lids he felt her eyes upon him, felt upon his cheek the approach of her light breath.

Had he really been asleep he could not have been more held—more held in every sense, more helpless to the sport of fantasy. Had life depended on it he would not have stirred ; had that bending figure threatened death he would have taken it without a sigh.

How long she remained thus poised over him he could not measure, but the spell was broken at last by a joy, by a pain too exquisite, it seemed, for mortal to endure. For an instant against his heart he felt her bosom lie, upon his forehead the pressure of her lips.

Light and darkness, heaven and earth, swam in

chaos before his brain. When he came to himself and staggered to his feet, wildly calling "Diana, my goddess!" nothing answered him but the sigh of the night, the trembling of the honeysuckle leaves.

* * * * *

As she stepped once more into the yellow light of her room there was a tender, amused smile on Donna Julia's lips.

"Poor child! At least there is another who has had one perfect moment!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

SUMMONED at sunrise to attend the King on one of his erratic descents upon the garrison of a neighbouring town, Neuberg was destined to pass the whole of the next day in the saddle.

They rode hard all through the bluster of a spring morning, broke fast on horseback, reviewed cavalry, inspected new fortifications, cast a whole population into excitement; thence departing, they left a scene of general discomfort behind, for the King was more lavish of blame than praise, and seldom found matters on a par with his constantly varying standards.

They mounted fresh horses and covered several further leagues of road, to surprise in its turn a camp of exercise on the plains. And, in a little deluge of rain, the indefatigable Sovereign examined muskets and tested the progress of recruits, while an unfortunate instructor perspired himself wetter than even the weather could make him, roared himself hoarse, and finally, whilst attempting a new manœuvre (of His Majesty's own device), clubbed his immature battalion into inextricably hard knots.

Neuberg and the other Equerry looked on with

seasoned philosophy and resignation. Both were thoroughly accustomed to the King's periodical outbursts of energy, when it seemed as if the very air he moved in was charged with electricity, when no detail was too small, no matter too private, for his searching investigation, for his autocratic interference.

To-day the King's restlessness had taken a military bend. To-morrow it might take a municipal turn. Once they had known him make a surprise-tour through the ladies' boarding-schools of his kingdom. Great indeed had been the flutter thereof: a memorable event to the "future mothers of his people"—as His Majesty had addressed them—who had had rare occasions to exchange ogles with the young officers of his suite, and among whom the talk of moustaches and uniforms had not yet subsided.

But when, after a dismal meal in a sodden tent, Count Neuberg was ordered by his Royal Master forthwith to select a third mount for himself from the camp stables, and to convey to the Forest-Master on the distant Geisburg his Royal intention of reviewing the Foresters on the morrow at noon, it required all the Equerry's sense of discipline to keep him from openly showing his disgust.

The distance was great; the mountain-roads at this times of the year execrable for travelling; the sun was already past its meridian, and he had jogged since dawn; he had been wet through twice; but all this was nothing in comparison with the fact that it would be almost beyond human power for him to

be back at the capital in time for Eva's début that evening at the Opera.

As a thundercloud gathered on his brow, that which had been so portentous all day on the King's seemed to clear away.

"You will consider yourself," said His Majesty graciously, fortifying himself with a glass of raw spirits against the long homeward ride—"you will consider yourself relieved from all further duties to-day and to-morrow, Count Neuberg."

The officer saluted with a scathing internal irony, and started for the stable-huts in a black fit of fury. He found a beast that, if it showed proof of a vast amount of bone, seemed also to vouchsafe the possession of a little blood, and consequently of some staying-power. As they trotted out of the camp at the moderate rate of the good rider who means to use his steed to the utmost, the sun suddenly broke gloriously over the drenched world.

Neuberg felt instinctively that the poor brute he bestrode carried a mettled heart. He leant over and patted his neck.

"Between us," said he, "we may do it yet."

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It was full dark before the tired rider saw from the brow of the nearest hill the distant gleam of the Capital. The charger had carried him gallantly, but the soft-hearted Neuberg, eagerly as his impatience pushed him, now forbore to spur the exhausted animal; so it was at a foot-pace that they re-entered the town.

He would be just in time, after all, if he went

straight to the Opera House. There he could hide at the back of the stage-box where Spencer and Rochester would be awaiting him. Mud-stained he was up to the eyes, disordered, soiled with sweat and foam, reeking of steed and saddle ; but he would not lose one note of the nightingale's voice, one look of the dear eyes, one movement of the illumined figure. Above all, he would be there to protect her with his presence ; he felt that she had come to rely upon him more than she herself would admit. He could not shelter her from unhallowed criticism nor from admiration that was more unhallowed still, but he could and would stand between her and insult, whether it came from high or low.

The ordinary type of man enamoured of an actress loves the actress before the woman ; he has been first led to admire and desire chiefly because so many others admire and desire. He revels in her celebrity, triumphs in her public triumph ; the more she gives herself to the world, the prouder is he. But Neuberg loved the woman, and although in his simple way he was glad each time he saw her gladness (and to carry the world before her by the power of her gift had become a necessary part of Eva's existence), it had long been his dream to wean her by degrees from the perilous joys of stage life, so that he might keep her some day for himself alone.

As he now rode slowly through the streets, heedless of the curiosity that he and his steed excited—eloquent as their appearance was of long and hasty travel—glowing visions of the warm, brilliant theatre, with Eva's loveliness as its central point,

floated many-coloured before his tired eyes, with now and again a dearer vision of a homely Eva by a quiet hearth !

At the corner of the great square he dismounted and hailed a passing trooper and gave the horse into his charge, with orders to conduct it to the Palace stables and see it especially well attended to. Then, glad to be free of his encumbrance, whose faltering paces had in the end been a sore trial to the lover's impatience, he set off as speedily as his own stiffened limbs would allow him towards the Opera square.

Turning the corner, his eyes instinctively sought for the illuminated façade of the theatre. But vast was his surprise and alarm to perceive but the beam of a lamp, shining low and solitary, out of the great black front. With a haste fear-borrowed, he pushed onward, knocked against the little strolling groups that moved away from the theatre, and caught guttural exclamations of disgust and loud complaint as he passed.

"These singers," growled a fat burgher, rolling by, "one never knows what is the matter with them."

Neuberg's heart beat to suffocation. He thrust his way roughly through the little crowd which was still conning a placard pasted on the closed door of the theatre. All gave way before his uniform.

Still wet from the printing press, the sheet proclaimed in gigantic black letters that, owing to the sudden indisposition of the Signora Eva Visconti, the performance announced for that night could not take place.

The sudden indisposition of Signora Eva Visconti ! Somehow the words failed to convey conviction, hardly meaning. The blood buzzed in his veins ; curvetting black letters danced before his eyes ; he could not have said what wild conjectures were trying to form themselves amid the chaos of his mind.

Presently a running figure darted through the desultory groups in the square, straight as an arrow towards him ; and, panting, his eye aflame, stood the Duke of Rochester, looking at his friend.

“Neuberg !” cried he breathlessly, paused as if to seek for words, then blurted out : “I do not know where Eva is !”

Neuberg had seen the young Englishman under the stress of many different emotions, but he had never yet seen him completely denuded as now of all his native reserve. A dire sense of apprehension seized upon his own soul at sight of the lad's white heat of excitement ; he turned purple and then livid, and then, to his own astonishment, found himself of a sudden exceedingly calm.

“You have been to her room, then ?”

“I will tell you everything,” cried Rochester, seized the officer's arm and poured forth a rapid, disconnected narrative, while Neuberg, motionless, listened. “I spent the afternoon at the Palace. The air was full of rumour and excitement ; the King was in one of his rampant moods, that fool Manteufel said, and there was no knowing what would happen. I left the Countess at four o'clock and went to see Spencer. Could not find him ; there was no one in his rooms. I left a note saying

you had not returned yet, but that I would meet him at the Opera. On my way back to our house, as I passed the Palace, I saw that damned Sachs riding off like fury. Then I went home. There I found that, meanwhile, Spencer had called and left word that he was dining with the Countess, but would meet us at the theatre. I dressed and got our flowers, and soon after seven went to the theatre. They were lighting up, and the first thing I see is a man putting up that placard. Of course, I made for Eva's house, running like a hare. The door was open, the maid, the landlady and two or three friends were all gossiping together. I asked for her ; they told me she was not in. She had received a letter in the afternoon, brought by Herr von Sachs, upon reading which (they said) she appeared much disturbed, though she had at once sat down and answered it ; after which she had locked herself in her room, scolded the maid when she went to knock ; and the maid had heard her walking up and down, and talking to herself, and knocking the furniture about, and sometimes crying and sobbing. At last she suddenly came out, wrapped up in her pelisse and thickly veiled. She ordered a hackney-coach and drove away, taking the turn up by the Palace. As soon as I heard this I ran back to the Palace, and there——" He stopped, as if the words choked him.

"And there?" repeated Neuberg, who laid an icy hand on his.

"And there I learnt that the King, hearing on his return that the performance at the Opera would

not take place, had immediately left the town. He has gone to his hunting-box."

"To his hunting-box?" echoed Neuberg.

"Yes," said the Duke harshly, "to his hunting-box, because to-morrow night he inspects the Forsters. Do you understand? Neuberg, wake up, man! It is only eight o'clock."

Neuberg roused himself from his thoughts and dashed the sweat from his forehead.

"Eight o'clock," he repeated. "And at what hour did you say Eva left her house?"

"It could not," said the Duke, "be more than half an hour ago. The bells had rung the half-hour before I reached her door, and they told me she had not been gone five minutes."

"Eight o'clock," said Neuberg again. He reckoned rapidly. "By carriage road two hours to the Geisberg; on a good horse, by the paths, an hour." He took two or three running steps out of the shelter of the Arcade into the Square, which was now quite empty. Then he stopped.

"Where is Spencer?" he asked. Then with an accent of deep bitterness: "Ah, true, with his Countess! Well, then, I will go alone."

"Only get me a mount," cried Rochester, panting at his elbow, "and you shall not go alone."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ONCE clear of the town, Neuberg set spurs to his horse and rode as for a race, Rochester after him. They covered four or five miles of open road without drawing rein.

The night was sharp after the wet day, but the sky had cleared and the fine decreascent moon sailed on a sea of iridescent cloudlets. They exchanged no word as they went. The rhythm of their mad progress, which seemed to gather speed from its own speed, to double and treble itself as they advanced ; the snorts of the driven horses ; the pumping of saddle and girth ; the sougning of the night air in their ears ; the occasional clink of the soldier's scabbard on his stirrup-iron—these were the only sounds about them, and they rather blended in with, than broke upon, the silent tumult of their thoughts.

Presently giant silhouettes of trees flew past them from the level hedgerow on either side ; they were approaching the forest. The air grew heavy with the breath of the sleeping woods at night. Then the road before them was swallowed in darkness into which they plunged, and they felt themselves gathered up into a whispering mystery of trees.

From out of the solitude of the plain, it was like

passing into a vast company. Shady forms clustered round them in myriads, and ever more and more—hands outstretched to arrest or to speed, gesticulating, warning, encouraging—a mighty host, all closing in upon them, all eager, all friendly.

Suddenly Neuberg, always the foremost rider, in spite of the Duke's lighter weight and brave heart, called briefly to his companion. They wheeled to the right, and, perforce at a soberer pace, the two riders, now knee to knee, pressed along a sidepath where the sympathetic beeches crowded closer than ever and the underwood clutched at them with thousands of fingers as they passed.

It was so dark in this forest cutting that horse and man felt rather than saw their way. With startled cry the birds, roused from sleep, flew whirring from their path. The road had grown very steep. The patient horses slipped and strained, but Neuberg's determination carried him and his comrade relentlessly and safely on. The soft earth sucked at the hoofs; a little stream tinkled somewhere over its stony course far below them; the smell of last year's leaves and of this year's pushing growth, mingled and crushed into poignancy beneath their tread, rose to their nostrils. Here, in the heart of the thicket, the ruffling spring winds high in the tree-tops murmured for miles around them with a voice like the roar of the sea on the beach, but without once striking their faces. Ever and anon they came into spaces bald and gray in the faint moonlight, where a stray rabbit shot like a flying ball from their approach.

The way grew again steeper ; the forms of the trees changed ; the soil grew harder, more stony, interspersed with tufts of heather and clumps where the dead bracken overlay the young shoots. The damp earthy smell of the lower woods was blown away by a keen, clean wind which bore on its wings resinous aroma of pine and larch.

" See," said Neuberg, halting at the entrance of one of these open spaces and pointing to the heights, " there is the Geisberg."

Above the black belt of pines the white face of the hunting-box shone mistily forth. Little yellow dots of light, some moving, some stationary, glimmered upon it.

Rochester heard his friend draw a breath that ran hissing through his set teeth ; and his heart, seething with many conflicting emotions, felt loyally sore for that rending grief.

His own personality, hitherto the only important thing in the life of Edward Warrender, seemed to have become completely merged for the moment into the larger interest around him. His first thought at the news of Eva's defection had been for Neuberg. He had permitted his friend to take the lead in everything to-night, and followed him on this wild ride, submitted with all patience to be splashed with mud, struck with flying gravel at his horse's tail, lashed by the rebound of twig and branchlet. Now, as Neuberg again set spurs to his horse and urged it upon the steep aspiring path, the Duke again submitted unquestioningly.

They were half-way across the clearing when the

officer once more abruptly drew rein and once more pointed upwards.

"Look!" said he, and in the dim moonlight there seemed to be a bitter smile upon his lip.

Rochester turned, after a startled glance of inquiry, to follow the direction of the extended arm, and between the black plumes of pines saw, fluttering in and out, a rapidly moving light.

As they stood in strained stillness, the rushing tide of wind brought to their ears the distant beat of hoofs and a rumble of wheels on the rocky road. The eyes of the two men met and the Duke knew that all hope of intercepting Eva before she reached the hunting-box had failed.

"Shall we go back?" said he at last hoarsely.

"Back!" said Neuberg. "No! thousand devils, on!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WITHIN a hundred yards of the spot where the cross-path through the pine-woods opened out on the high-road, almost within a gunshot of the Royal Lodge itself, Neuberg drew rein and dismounted, briefly bidding his comrade do the same.

"There is an old shed to the right where we can tether the beasts," said he. "Follow me."

They led their horses to the shelter in question. It stood in a small glade upon the level ground which they had now reached.

Characteristically, Neuberg paused to loosen bridle and saddle and to throw his own cloak over the animal's loins. The Duke noted and copied every action of his friend. Then they sallied forth once more, the Duke for guidance laying his hand lightly on the other's sleeve.

As they emerged from the black shelter of the wood upon the broad, bare road, and beheld the Lodge rear its white blank face before them, a carriage approached from the rear of the house and swept across the main entrance, passing the two young men so closely that the emptiness of the vehicle as well as the livery of the servants on the

box became plainly visible to them. It clattered through the open archway into the stable-yard, unchallenged by the Forester who stood sentinel beside it.

Neuberg caught the Duke's hand, holding it for a second in his with a fierce clutch.

"Sach's carriage," said he, "coming from the private entrance!"

They went forward into the moonlight, Neuberg marching on again with determined tread; then the discreet silence of the house, emphasised by the four or five winking yellow windows, the sense of the utter futility of the errand, its danger and uncertainty, together with his absolute ignorance of Neuberg's purpose, began to weigh heavily upon the Duke's spirits. He had the Englishman's inborn horror of emotional scenes, the gentleman's dislike to intrude where he was not wanted. The garment of his chivalrous purpose had fallen away from him; he felt naked, foolish, and unprotected.

But the uncompromising, illogical splendour of his friend's passion made him ashamed of venturing upon more than a perfunctory remonstrance.

"We can do no good, old fellow; what use in going on?"

"To make sure—to see—to have the proof!" said the other, without turning his head. And Rochester, without another word, followed again.

The Forester sentry called a rough challenge, was as roughly answered, and fell back astonished at sight of the familiar face and uniform.

Neuberg clinked up the steps, shadowed bravely

by the Duke, whose discomfort in the situation grew every second more intense, and who certainly wished himself a hundred miles away—were it even back with Smiley !

At the main door they were again challenged and again recognition of the Equerry was sufficient to secure to them a free access.

The entrance-hall was dimly lit and almost empty. Despite the vast fire roaring in the stove, the place had the heavy atmosphere of an uninhabited house. Skeleton heads beneath gaunt white antlers looked down at them from eyeless sockets on every wall ; boars' masks, scientifically stuffed, sniffed with varnished, yellow-tusked snouts and glared through their bristles with fierce red-glass eyes.

Neuberg's riding-boots rang terribly loud, so Rochester thought, on the polished floors as he made for a small anteroom on the left, where, by the light of a single oil-lamp, a burly gray-bearded man in green uniform, with large horn spectacles on his nose, sat jotting down notes in a leather-bound book. A boar-hound lay at his feet.

At the sight of the new-comers the man rose and saluted simply enough, but his eyes, owl-like through the round rims, betrayed the same surprise that had greeted them hitherto.

"Where is His Majesty ? " said Neuberg briefly.

"His Majesty has retired to his private apartment," said the Forester, "with orders that none but Herr von Sachs be allowed access to him. His Majesty is about to sup, and alone. Yet I have no doubt, Herr Graf, that if you have any special in-

formation to give him"—the speaker's glance here travelled wonderingly over the disordered mud-stained figure to rest upon the face, worn and lined into a sudden look of age—"he would at once order your admittance. Shall I seek Herr von Sachs?"

"Do not trouble, Forest Master," answered Neu-berg, with extraordinary coolness. "I see you are busy with your schedule. I know my way about. Where, only tell me, shall I find Herr von Sachs?"

The Master of the Horse (the other made answer) was even now, he believed, supping in his own apartment—the room known as the Archduke's.

Neu-berg nodded, touched his cap, and, laying a hand on Rochester's shoulder, marshalled him to an inner hall, where four passages divided and a great staircase rose and branched apart. All was as sparsely lighted as the rest of the Lodge, as perfectly silent and as deserted. He paused a second and pointed to the first door in the gallery above.

"The Archduke's rooms are beyond," said he; "but we shall not disturb Sach's supper yet awhile. Our way lies here;" and he turned down the side-passage as he spoke.

They passed through a swing door and emerged into an inner corridor, where, from the gush of hot savoury air, the distant clatter of voices and dishes and hurrying steps, Rochester surmised that they were near the kitchen regions. A small winding staircase rose at the further end. Neu-berg advanced, and his heavy foot upon the creaking wood seemed to awaken alarming echoes in the unknown

vast recesses of the building. After a steep climb, they were confronted by another swing-door through which, out of all but obscurity, they came forth into comparative brightness.

It was a gallery of handsome proportions which connected the two wings of the Lodge. Just within the recesses formed by the little door Neuberg paused at last and looked from one side to the other, head bent forward, listening acutely.

Rochester, too, gazed around him and wondered. They stood about half-way in a long, low-ceiled gallery.

After the simplicity of the arrangements that had met his eye hitherto, the Royal luxury of the present surroundings was all the more striking. Carpets of deepest pile and richest hue lay softly beneath his feet. Upon the walls, between panels of old leather, glowing with deep and gorgeous tints, hung pictures of hunting scenes in Dutch frames, Snyders, and Brancas, and others, dingy, gory, marvellous. Bunches of white lights in rococo bronze chandeliers, placed on marble consoles, threw islets of gentle radiance at set intervals in the sea of mellow duski-ness. At each end the gallery spread into a landing immediately facing which was a doorway. Both these doors were closed.

The absolute emptiness and silence of the place, all warmed, decorated, and luminous as it was, struck the Duke as singularly sinister. The temple of the hideous god to whom Eva—the fresh, the young, the laughter-loving, spring-hearted Beau-Sourire—was about, in her folly, to yield herself up

in voluntary sacrifice, had been put into festival array.

Here was about to be enacted a crime, and all was ready for the deed. It was worse than murder! For himself, he knew, no less than for Neuberg, that after this night Eva would cease to exist, except in memories more painful than those of death—cease to exist more inevitably and more terribly than if the grave had closed upon her.

An immense pity for the woman, a longing to save her yet, now stirred his budding manhood to an unknown depth. In the unsophisticated chivalry of youth and inexperience, the thought that it was his brother-man that was about to do this wrong upon the weaker vessel, that was about to brush off at one brutal stroke the fresh bloom that made her most beautiful in life, drove all his former considerations—all his considerations of mere common-sense and gentlemanly discretion—out of his head.

He turned to Neuberg, a hot torrent of impossible suggestion trembling upon his lips, but was arrested by a glaring eye. At that moment the door on the right was opened a little way, just enough to emit the slim black figure of the King's valet as it glided discreetly away. They could hear the subdued thud-thud of his feet upon the great stairs beyond.

A moment later the same door was again opened, flung widely back upon its hinges, and the King himself stood upon the threshold, his square shoulders outlined against the background of rosy brilliance within. There was a glint of diamonds among the lace ruffles upon his great chest, a sheen of close-

drawn silk upon the calves of his muscular legs, planted apart, as he stood in an attitude of triumphant expectancy, gazing down the length of the passage towards the still closed door on the opposite side.

The two young men unconsciously—for the habit of deference at Court is one more easily acquired than laid aside—had, by a common movement, stepped back into the shadow of the doorway.

After a second or two, the King slowly turned on his heel and walked back into the room, where he was lost to sight behind a great brocaded screen. The door, however, he left open, and the rosy glow shone out into the gallery like a signal light.

With clenched fists, breathlessly, they listened. There was no sound but that of the slow monotonous tread, dulled within the velvet recesses of the King's room on the right, and presently the hummed stanza of that Italian song with which Eva had seemed to challenge the Royal attention upon her first appearance at the Court. The steps and the song went to the same measure.

Rochester knew that Neuberger was trembling in every stalwart limb. Suddenly from out of the silence upon the left sprang the minutest noise—the click of a latch leaving the lock, then the swing of an easy door. Instantly in the opposite room the tread and the humming ceased. The whole atmosphere grew oppressive with expectancy. Then there came, as it were, a whisper of movement, the glide of an advance without sound of footfall, like the passage of the wind across the meadow, grass, or the rustle

of the serpent upon the rock. Rochester felt his companion tower, it seemed to him, into extraordinary height by his side, and—dull, horrible, uncanny—he distinctly heard the hard laboured beat of his heart.

With as simultaneous an impulse as that with which they had stepped back out of sight they now pressed forward from their concealment, to stand upon the passage of the woman whom the King expected.

The fall of her little sandalled shoe was lost in the thick carpet, but her draperies fretted and murmured at every undulating movement. In the nimbus of her hair trembled a diamond crescent; a single ruby glowed like an amber in her bosom, and round her waist a line of emeralds ran like a circle of green flame.

It was Julia de Lucena.

Ah, with what beauty had she decked herself! In the faint filmy green of her draperies, she seemed indeed, as Spencer had called her, a thing of fire and air.

Yet Julia de Lucena, her eye fixed abstractedly on the rose-lighted doorway which was her goal, did not seem to be possessed of any special emotion. In her deliberate indolent gait there was none of the tremulous hesitation of a woman's first yielding, nor yet the eager haste of a happy mistress who glories in her choice. Serene deliberateness, queenly indifference, were enthroned upon her face. So might have moved and looked Selene herself, bent on the freak of some earthly love.

But when, after a few paces, her glance fell on the intruders standing motionless across her path, a faint look of haughty wonder swept like a wave across her pensive sweetness.

Then she recognised them ! That stalwart man with mud-encrusted uniform, with the riding-boots discoloured to the knee, with the disordered hair, the convulsed crimson face in which the fixed, starting eyeballs stared wide—that was Count Neuberg—Count Neuberg, Spencer's friend ! And beside him that slim youth in travel-soiled evening attire, mud-bespattered brocade, and fine kerseymere that clung to limbs as delicate as Daphnis'—that youth whose tossed red curls stood off from a face petrified into a white rigidity of horror, with eyes cast down as if in shame—that was her exquisite young adorer, the fine flower of English Dukes !

Were the gods making play of their daughter ? or was there, after all, one Avenger above, and was this His overtaking ? Or yet was her world given over to the sport of devils ?

The blood ebbed back to her heart. For a second—for the fraction of a second—she felt her knees give way ; she thought that she would fall, and all the energies of her soul went up in a voiceless cry to the Something that ruled her destiny : " Let me walk on ! Let me walk on ! "

The forces of heart and nerve answered the rallying call ; on she walked in silence, holding herself like a queen on the way to her throne. With glance unshrinking she met Neuberg's dread accusing eyes ; she saw the face of Rochester, that could not in

shame look upon her (oh, that was the worse!). She swept over the stern unbending figure; the other figure seemed as if struck with death. So she passed on, erect, deliberate, scornful—passed and glided into the rosy radiance, and quietly closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ONCE more a paralysing stillness seemed to encompass like a spell the solitary house on the pine-clad heights—a stillness which, in the wadded luxury where they stood, was to the two men, not the blessed quiet of repose, but the evil, secret, busy stillness of treacherous doings.

A train of violet scent hung upon the air with mocking sweetness.

A gust of wind came circling round the walls like a mighty sigh and exhaled itself into silence again. And then, as from a great distance from behind the closed door, the King's voice rose into a great laugh of delight, followed by the clear note of the woman's voice, high and delicate, as the plaint of the smitten lute-string, or the ring of a crystal cup. The spell was broken; Neuberg and Rochester, who had been staring, stupefied and unseeing, into each other's eyes, now started and exchanged a look of awakening speculation.

Without a word they turned out of the gallery, let fall the padded door behind them, and, Neuberg leading as before, they passed downstairs and through the passage, unmolested as they had come.

Instead, however, of making his way through the antechamber into the hall, the officer turned abruptly off into a side passage which led to a back-door. This was unlocked. Key and hinges had been well oiled, for it opened noiselessly.

A moment Neuberg paused outside; the door swung back upon them and fell into its lock without a sound; then he gave a little chuckle which, in his young friend's ear, sounded hideously incongruous, and pointed to the discreet little path winding away behind high shrubs, and then to the slender footsteps that marked the soft ground immediately under the ray of a dim lamp.

"Morals of Courts," whispered he derisively: "if you want to know how to do a thing, study the King's methods!"

He caught Rochester by the arm as he spoke, and started off down the path at a round pace. The Duke felt him lurch two or three times like a drunken man, but he himself walked as in a dream.

There was no sentinel at the garden gate, and in safety they crossed the bare open space where the gravel had been ploughed into deep ruts by the carriage of the King's visitor, and they plunged under the damp black canopy of the forest. Here Neuberg, to his companion's further surprise and immeasurable disgust, broke from his side and gave way to a series of incongruous, not to say indecent, expressions of joy. He threw up his hands to heaven, he stamped on the slippery carpets of pine needles, he gyrated in minutest circles.

"Oh, Beau-Sourire," he cried in ecstasy, "how

could I have thought so meanly of you ! Your beauty was not made to be *bought* for the pastime of a King ; your sweet weight could never press the cushions of a pander's carriage ; your proud foot tread the stealthy bypath that leads to a Royal *buen-retiro* ; your nightingale voice be uplifted in such a cage as that ! " and he shook his fist at the Geisberg's secret white face.

Motionless and silent stood Rochester, and let this flood of emotion surge against him.

" Did you know," cried Neuberg, unrepelled, " did you guess that there was death in my soul when I entered this place to-night ? that there was darkness infinite ? that there was hell ? But now, now, now, I am as one risen from the grave : life, joyous life, runs warm in these veins ! " His broad chest resounded as he thumped it. " My soul swims in glorious light ; the peace of heaven reigns upon all. O blessed moon," he cried, his voice swelling as he apostrophised the faint shaft of light that forced its way between the entwined branches, " look down this night upon a happy man ! Rochester, it is a rare thing in this world to see a happy man. You are young, my friend ; it will be something for you to remember in the years to come. "

He laughed wildly, broke into a savage war-dance, and tripping up against the Englishman, clasped him with a bear-like hug, and, in the impotence of tongue or limb to express his overcharged feelings, burst into tears.

With a strength that fury alone could have given him, Rochester roughly disengaged himself from

the embrace and propelled his companion into equilibrium with a couple of sturdy shoves. Nothing could have been more distasteful to his sore heart than Neuberger's selfish joy, nothing more grating to his chivalrous instincts, nothing more antipathetic to his national reserve, than this uncontrolled display of emotion.

"Oh, devil take you!" he cried, "you and your King and your country! A pretty lot you all are!" And then he added with cutting emphasis: "I shall be more anxious, I assure you, sir, to forget than to remember this event."

He drew out his handkerchief and began, all in the dark, to wipe his hands and flick at his clothes as if to dispel the clinging contamination, and, racking his brain the while for something that would stir the object of his irritation to the deepest, he added after a pause:

"And do you expect Mr. Spencer, your friend, to share in these ecstasies? You will at least be able to put his philosophy to the test."

Neuberger, a pace apart, still laughing hysterically and mopping his eyes, was struck into sudden silence. The mere mention of Spencer's name had sobered him as completely as if someone had flung a bucket of cold water over him.

"My God!" he cried in a sort of whisper, "how could I forget? Oh, my poor Michael, and I accused *you* of selfishness!"

He stood a moment breathing heavily in the dark, and then he cried roughly, "Come!" and turned on his heel.

Not another word was exchanged between them. In silence they groped their way to the shed ; in silence led forth their horses, Rochester following as unquestioningly as before, while Neuberg this time made for the road some hundred yards beneath the plateau. Here they mounted, and, still in silence, set out at a steady trot along the downward, homeward way. Now and then Rochester heard Neuberg sigh as if oppressed, and anon saw him look up to the sky as one sorely puzzled and shake his head.

But the Duke's own heart was bound up in too tight a grip of pain ; he could not even sigh, nor could he look upwards, for his trouble was one for which there was no help in heaven. His pride was bleeding from more than one wound, and bleeding inwardly, as is the way with such. The woman of high lineage, his kinswoman, his countrywoman ; she who had smiled upon him, who had as a Divine favour kissed him in his sleep ; his goddess for whom he had built a hidden shrine of boyish worship, whom he had loved and set apart from the rest of the world—all, all down in the dust ! He shuddered with a deadly nausea, as an injured man might at the ugliness of his own hurt. The first great disillusion in life is like a blighting frost in the young spring. The whole smiling face of Nature is changed in a moment ; the trees will bud again, the bulb will push fresh shoots, but the first exquisite, delicate, confident promise has been lost for ever.

It was only when the lights of the town shone out on the night before them that the silence between

the young men was broken. Then Rochester spoke out of the sour fury of his heart.

"And after all," he said, with a laugh, "we do not know where Eva went, nor why she did not sing. We have a proverb in England that warns us against premature rejoicing. I for one," said the youth in secret to himself, "shall never trust woman again."

Neuberg drew rein and turned in his saddle for a second, but Rochester, if he could have seen as well as felt the murderous look, would have cared no more. Then the officer violently set spurs to his horse and never relaxed in his breakneck pace until he reached the Palace stables.

Rochester, left in the rear, despite his efforts, reached the yard only in time to see his friend leave it on foot at a running pace. He himself, dismounting and setting off in pursuit, with stiffened, almost failing, limbs, had hard work to keep the flying figure in sight. But he knew from the direction that its goal was Eva's house.

Uninvited, hardly knowing why, he followed. There was in his soul a great dread of the first moment of solitude.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

UPON the little landing upon which opened the doors both of Eva's parlour and bedroom the Duke found Neuberg, standing and listening. Obeying a peremptory signal, he bent his ear and listened likewise.

Upon Neuberg's pale parched lips there was a curious smile. Within, voices were calling to each other from one room to the other—the unmodulated soprano of the singer, the mellow bass of Spencer. Both rang upon a cheerful note.

"Civilisation," Spencer was saying, "has brought us and brings us many thoughts good and noble; it has abolished superstition and torture. But every good has its attendant evil. We, most of us, are growing effete now that personal courage is no longer the main test of a man's worth. We have become ultra-luxurious—creatures of many wants—since the spread of education and the longing for the beautiful begins to reach from the higher to the lesser classes; incomplete in our lives and discontented in our thoughts, since we no longer accept without inquiry the maxims and reasons that satisfied our ancestors. The old simple remedies, the herb-drink, the febrifuge, are as much things of the past

as the unquestioning faith, the natural acceptance of life's problem, the charm and the incantation."

"And the moral is, lieber Herr Doctor," interrupted Eva, with clear burst of laughter—"the moral is : camomile tea !"

"Camomile tea, certainly," said Spencer smoothly ; "a most valuable remedy, if applied in the proper conditions. These little flowers (ah, how aromatic they are !) must be infused in boiling water ; the water must be quite, not only just, boiling ; the decoction allowed to stand for one minute to draw the whole essence, yet poured off in time to leave the great bitterness unextracted—for even the camomile flower has its latent bitterness."

"Ah !" sighed Eva gustily, "what flower in life has not ?"

"Sometimes," added Spencer parenthetically, "the bitter is the more wholesome portion ; but if the potion is to avail, the patient must take it as hot as possible and in bed, and must endeavour to compose instantly afterwards to sleep. Therefore, Madame Eva," he added briskly, "as soon as you are in bed, I pray you to let me know."

"Good, good !" said Eva ; and the sound of a stay-lace hissing was heard in the momentary silence.

"If you are within an appreciable distance," said Spencer's voice, "I will set the water to boil."

The clatter of her slipper heels sounded to and fro upon the painted boards. There was an energetic closing and opening of drawers, then another pause, and then she began afresh in altered tones :

"Spencer, I shall never forget this night—never. When I went to you, every fibre of me was in revolt. I was furious, insulted, disgusted. I was in that mood when I believe a human being is made or marred. Like molten metal, I was ready to be poured into any mould, according into whose hands I fell. My good angel took me to you. Oh, can I ever forget the heavenly things you have said to me—your heavenly goodness! You have raised me in my own eyes—made me understand my own dignity and the high vocation of womanhood. I know now how divine a thing even hopeless love may be—how great a gift, although it may bring no return—indeed, nothing but sorrow. How true it is—I feel it in myself—that an unselfish love is ennobling and purifying! What was it you said? 'All trouble and pain in this world will work to our perfecting, if we only know how to use it.' How hard, how cruel, how cold we should be if we knew ourselves exempt from suffering and sorrow! At the least, it is the one great bond of humanity, at the highest, the incentive which makes us rise superior to its pettiness. I am not jealous any more," she went on, but with a little catch in her breath. "May you never be put to the test yourself; may your love never be less happy than now! I wanted to tell you this, Spencer, but I could not whilst you were looking at me."

"It strikes me," said Spencer's voice, "that you are catching cold."

"Oh, dear!" said Eva rather crossly, "I wish you were not always such a grandfather!" She

petulantly kicked off her slippers; they hurtled across the room and violently struck the door, outside which her lover was eavesdropping. Then again in a new tone of voice: "I wonder," she said, "where that great stupid Neuberg can be all this while?"

Neuberg's face, which had been clouded for a moment, became suddenly illumined; he opened the door of the sitting-room and walked in, followed by Rochester.

With his back to them, Spencer was carefully bending over the stove, waiting for the ebullition of a little kettle. In his right hand he held the china teapot with the lid off. He made no attempt to turn round at the sound of the intruder's footsteps, but cried cheerily: "Oh, Neuberg, is it you? And are you there too, my little friend? You come at the psychological moment; half a minute later, and you should not have been admitted to see Eva; but now you may watch her drink her posset."

From the inner room Eva yawned obstreperously. "Ah, Doctor, who are you talking to there?" she asked; "and what about the famous potion?"

"Coming, coming," cried the Philosopher. The kettle ceased singing, and instantly began to jet steam and vapour.

"Neuberg," said Spencer, "will you kindly empty the hot water out of the cup and bring it here?"

"Ah!" cried Eva within, "is that truant with you? And what has he got to say for himself? Let him come in."

"Give me the cup," said Spencer; then, struck

by his friend's taciturnity, he wheeled round and looked from one to the other. With the tea-pot in one hand and the cup in the other, he remained staring. Neuberg looked like a man who has just ridden off a battlefield; the Duke as if he had escaped from a house of thieves.

"In God's name!" ejaculated Spencer, and grew quite pale himself, "what has happened to you, my dear fellows?"

The singer's chief virtue was not patience. She began to clamour.

"What are you up to, you people? Doctor, is this how you treat a nervous patient? If you do not come this minute, both of you, I shall have to get up and see what the matter is!"

"Don't you mean to administer your prescription?" said Neuberg; "then I will!" He took the cup from Spencer's hand and boldly entered Eva's room. The Philosopher followed with the teapot, and Rochester, in a dreamy state, brought up the rear. He was past feeling any strong emotion just now. Even his own actions seemed remote from his thoughts; it was as though he were an actor in a play, mechanically carrying out an unimportant part; or, yet again, a weary spectator who scarcely knows he watches a fleeting show that he will not take the trouble to understand.

In this impersonal fashion he saw Eva's spacious fresh bedroom and its white toilet-table and the bed in the alcove under the blue and white muslin curtains; saw Eva propped up among pillows, looking more girlish than she had ever seemed

before, large and soft and fair, with her hair in two great ropes on either shoulder.

"Merciful heavens!" she cried, as Neuberg advanced into the circle of light towards the bed, "when did you last have a wash? Do not come near my little bed, you muddy monster!"

"Eva!" said Neuberg, standing on the rug at a respectful distance, but reaching her with his eye's desire, and making an effort at his usual gaiety of manner, "what a lovely jacket! You are more beautiful than ever."

"It is more than I can say for you, my poor friend. Ah, and my little Postilion, and where have you been?—postilioning again, Duke?" with a mocking glance at his nether limbs, where the breeches were rent below the knees: "you forgot to put those boots on, that is evident!" Then she suddenly raised and stiffened herself, and her face changed. "But what is the matter?" she cried sharply. "Spencer, what have they been doing? Neuberg, speak?"

All was silent, but in the silence the spoon rattled against the saucer of the cup that Neuberg was holding.

Eva leant forward in her bed and pointed her white forefinger at the officer.

"You were out with the King at dawn," she cried; "the King has made you gallop all day, but it is not that. Ah! wait a minute; that little man was inquiring for me when you found the theatre closed. You met, perhaps; you were frightened about me; you imagined——"

She read Neuberg's convicted countenance like a book, then she suddenly clapped her hands together and cried :

" My God ! they have been to the Geisberg after me ! "

She flung herself back on her pillows and broke into a wild fit of laughter, in the midst of which she all at once stopped, flushed crimson and grew rigid.

" And you thought that of me ! How dared you ! how dared you ! "

She turned her hot face away, but Neuberg could see an angry blood stain the fair neck to the edge of her wrapper. Forgetful of her prohibition, he put down the cup, and, kneeling beside her white bed, ventured to lay his grimy fingers upon her clenched hand. Spencer looked on, benevolent, superior, abstaining from interference between those two for whose mutual happiness he so earnestly wished.

Neuberg, indeed, seemed oblivious just then of everything except himself and his beloved.

" It was," he said, " a crime to doubt you ; yet—yes, I went to the Geisberg to save you, if possible. And I stood like a spy outside the King's door, waiting to see who would pass in to him, and . . . Eva, I thought to see you. But if I sinned, I suffered ! Eva, when I heard the sound of the woman coming, I could not look up."

" The woman ! " exclaimed Eva, turning her angry face round and snatching her hand from Neuberg's touch. " The woman ! there was a woman, then—it is a harem ! My faith ! I ought to be flattered ! A pretty master you have got,

Neuberg. Shame on you, that you can serve such a one! Yes, I did receive an invitation from his illustrious Majesty. I answered it, too—an answer he will not file among the State archives! He does not beat about the bush, your King. Pif, paf, he throws you a jewel, and then it is: 'Into my arms, Beauty!' Oh, if I could only have felt my hand against his cheek!"

"Angel, angel!" murmured Neuberg ecstatically.

The angel gasped.

"No, Spencer, no," she went on as soon as she recovered breath enough, "I am not going into hysterics again. So, Captain von Neuberg, you thought your Eva was made like that; that a Royal satyr had only to smile and to beckon, and the nymph was his! Flattering, to say the least of it."

She paused; good-humour was gradually overspreading once more a countenance never made for continued frowns, but there was still a sparkle of malice in her eyes.

"Well," she ejaculated, with one of her exuberant sighs, "you seem to have gone a pretty wild-goose chase anyhow. Serves you right; you are enough to frighten the crows. The postilion over there has had more than he bargained for, or I am much mistaken. For God's sake, Spencer, make the poor child sit down; he looks tired to death! Well, there, I suppose I must forgive you. It was certainly startling to find not only that the bird would not sing, but that it had flown. Sing! Eva sing for that Pasha!" she exclaimed, with a sudden fresh

burst of passion. "I had rather never open my beak again! And as for flying to his infamous roosting-place, I'd rather hop on one leg for the rest of my time! No, no, not for me! No farther did my wings bear me than to our good Spencer's cock-loft, and a pretty scene I made him, poor fellow! He got it all—the whole gamut of a woman in hysterics."

Fluctuations of sunshine and cloud swept across her face as rapidly as across an April sky. The storm still lingered in the atmosphere and shook her at intervals as with fierce reminiscence, but there was no more sourness in her mood than in the sweetest mood of spring; and Neuberg, knowing himself forgiven, began to feel the secondary trouble weigh upon him with increasing seriousness.

He rose from his knees and stood for a minute or two eyeing Spencer in deep thought. As the latter met his friend's look, a certain anxiety began to creep into the placidity of his expression.

"Gustaf," said he, "we do not yet know all. You are hiding something. You and that boy yonder, you have got into some precious scrape. Confess him, Eva."

"Oh," cried Eva, once more clasping her hands and gazing with a mixture of delight and terror at her lover's furrowed countenance, "you have not—you have not faced the King?"

"No," replied he in a low voice; "His Majesty has not yet, as far as I know, the least idea of our presence at the Geisberg to-night."

It would have been hard to say whether Eva's

sigh, as she threw herself back, were dedicated to relief or disappointment.

"My doctor," said she, "we are too romantic. Our friends have been through a good deal of hard exercise, and poor humanity is tired, that's all. You must take them home and tuck them up and give them camomile tea. . . ."

Here Neuberg turned upon her a look so eloquent of dumb distress that she broke off suddenly abashed and bewildered. After a second's hesitation, she held out her hand to him and said, in a voice of exquisite kindness :

"I see how it is: he has yet a burden on his breast. My dear fellow, it is I who will confess. I was wrong, entirely wrong, and you were right. I might as well have clasped Cleopatra's asp about my neck as those jewels; they were poisoned. Why I accepted them God only knows. I was mad, I think, but I am sane now." She cast, as she spoke, on Spencer a glance half sad, half arch. "I was possessed by a devil—he has exorcised it," she went on. "I had no more peace than you had, Neuberg, while those green-eyed things were under my roof; but now they are gone—ah, it is all over. I breathe again, and you need never be jealous any more."

Neuberg bent down over the gentle hand; but it was as much to hide his face as to thank his mistress. Her eye fell upon his bent, close-cropped head with an expression it had never worn towards her persevering lover before. All at once she began to laugh. "At any rate," she said, winking away a tear, "these emeralds have not been without their uses: they

have opened my eyes to the fact that we women cannot play with fire—a good lesson. They have opened Spencer's eyes to the true character of a King by whom he was ready to swear. Oh yes, you may be as philosophic now as you please, but you know you were nearly as angry as I was myself when I told you. And besides," she added and laughed mockingly, "for such of you as remain about that sacred Person, it will not be without interest, perhaps, to see whom the stones may next adorn."

Hardly had she said the words when her quick eye caught the look upon the Guardsman's face, as he hastily raised it and exchanged a glance with the Duke, who was himself unable to repress a movement that was like a spasm of pain.

"I will wager," she cried loudly—"I will wager that both these young men have seen my emeralds walk about this very night. Oh, do not deny it; your faces are open pages. Upon my soul, this model potentate is beyond everything. The lady—the lady, Neuberg? Ah! Come, you know you said you saw a lady; those emeralds were not walking about alone. What is the matter with you . . . since it was not Eva?"

Neuberg ran his hand distractedly through his hair, opened his mouth and closed it again dumbly; then, as if moved by a sudden resolve, he went over to Spencer and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Michael," said he, "if a hard thing has to be done, it were better it were done at once. You yourself would be the first to see it so. If a surgeon had to perform a cruel operation to save a man's life,

you would not call him a bad friend to that man, would you ? ”

Eva, awed into silence, opened a red mouth and round wide eyes and leant forward in the bed. Spencer's healthy face went suddenly white, but he did not speak.

“ Tell me,” went on Neuberg, in a voice which no one would have recognised as his, “ for what reason did you not spend the evening with the Countess de Lucena ? ”

Spencer sprang from his chair as if he had been struck ; an overpowering tide of blood rushed to his brow.

“ She sent word,” he said, almost in a whisper, “ that she had a headache.” Then, with a roar like that of a wounded lion : “ Why did you ask me that question ? ” cried he. “ Why did you ask me that question ? ”

There was an instant's terrible silence.

“ Why did you ask me that question ? ” repeated Spencer, flinging his clenched hands high above his head and shaking them as if he would defy truth itself.

“ Oh, Michael,” said poor Neuberg, “ she wore the emeralds ! ”

All instinctively averted their eyes from the stricken man. He stood with his arms still raised aloft yet another moment, then let them fall by his side, and after violently pacing the room twice up and down, rushed blindly to the door.

“ Spencer, be yourself ! ” cried Eva ; and then : “ Neuberg, go with him.”

The next moment she and Rochester were alone. Down Eva's cheeks the tears were streaming.

"Heavens, what a night!" said she. "Ah, Duke, and I who thought myself so unhappy to love in vain! To see someone that one loves suffer, that is the greatest grief of all."

The Duke detached himself from the wall against which he had been leaning, motionless and silent. As a man walking in his sleep he came over to Eva's side.

"No," said he, in a toneless voice, "there is a worse grief still: it is to see the one we love unworthy."

She looked after him, astonished, as without another word he turned and left her too.

But outside in the silent street, with only the stars of heaven to see him, the bond of iron which kept his faculties in control suddenly fell away; broken alike bodily and mentally, he cast himself against the wall of Eva's house, and, hiding his face in his hands, wept with sobs and tears.

* * * * *

Eva remained for a long time lost in reflection while her candles guttered in their sockets and night waned to morning. Then she roused herself with a deep sigh, and catching sight of the camomile tea, cold, untasted, by her bedside, took it and drained it at a draught.

"Oh," she said, her face drawn together with a grimace, "how bitter!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WITH what tightening of the heart a little while ago had Rochester contemplated the inexorable flitting of this month! Every warmer ray of sunshine, every new flower that burst its sheaf, every token of stronger life, had been as many painful reminders that the sands were running low in the glass of his happy hours.

But to-day, as shy of the company of his kind he strolled solitary on the deserted bank of the river without the town, and saw how the green had spread all over the country since his first acquaintance with it, how clothed were the bare branches, how tall the wheat, how flowered the wild orchid, and sweet the lilac bush, it was with a bitter joy he told himself that his month of fooling had nearly waned.

At his foot the river wound, dazzling beneath the cloudless sky; from above the song of the lark, beating against the vault of blue, fell back to the earth like a shower; but in Rochester's soul the freezing blight of disillusion had devastated all the garden of youth. Yonder, within that circle of gray walls, life had unfolded to him, the eager boy, undreamed of and exquisite prospects; but now he stood and

felt himself a man, hardened and embittered, the flower of his youth nipped in the blossom and the fruit of experience already bitter on his palate before he had tasted of its sweetness. All the glamour had been brushed at one swoop from what but yesterday had seemed so full, so warm, so joyously coloured a life. The companionship of Neuberg—Neuberg, who had danced with joy because *she* had borne the guilt instead of Eva—seemed almost unbearable ; still more so that of Spencer, the commoner, who had won because he had presumed, who had been favoured where he, the Duke of Rochester, had hesitated to aspire ; even Eva, wholesome, human Eva, who had once been to the healthy young appetite of his first emancipation all that it could crave for, had become, for a palate initiated to fare of a savour so exquisite, too coarse, too simple—distasteful !

The present was all weariness and vexation of spirit, the immediate past a blushing memory of green folly ; only the contemplation of the future, with its earnest duties, its dignity, its solid reality, could he face with re-establishment of equanimity. Well, it was all over ! But a few hours remained to him of his allotted span.

With what satisfaction would he see the dust of this unholy capital fall from his carriage-wheels—no later than this day ! For him the sun should set upon other scenes.

So determining, he turned upon his course and began hastening towards the town, following, as before, the bend of the river. Upon the little quay opposite Spencer's house he involuntarily halted for

a moment, and his mind went back to that night when he had felt, as he crossed the threshold of that house, that he was stepping into a new country. He thought of his own boyish simplicity with a pathetic sense of self pity. How far away it seemed separated by the gulf of last night's events! There was but one drop of consolation in his cup, and that consolation was an unworthy one: up yonder the superior man—the man of such experience in many climes—the conquering Philosopher, had been even more gallingly deceived, and was suffering at least no less than he!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

As Rochester stood and mused with a very withering curl upon his beardless lip, through the open door of the gothic house a figure emerged with the headlong energy that would have proclaimed it Neuberg, to anyone that knew him, even had not the blue-and-silver dolman flashed out into the sun.

Out in the centre of the road the King's Equerry paused, gyrated once upon himself as if to reconnoitre on every side, caught sight of the watcher under the poplar-tree, and, with an eager gesture, made straight for him.

Never to the Duke's eye had his month-old friend looked smarter or more soldierly spruce. There was not a speck or a crease on his uniform ; his face was shorn smooth as a woman's ; but yesterday's work had left its stamp upon it, nevertheless, and his encircled lids were those of a man who had not slept. Above all there was a look of intense gravity.

To Rochester's deliberate coolness, concentrated self-importance, and air of universal disapprobation, Count Neuberg paid—if, indeed, he noticed them—not the smallest attention.

"Where have you been ?" cried he, in greeting.

"I have hunted for you all the morning ;" and without waiting for a reply : "I must go to the Palace," said he ; "but we can talk as we go."

He gripped the boy by the elbow and started him in time to his own martial step by sheer moral and physical force. As they went Neuberg poured out his pent-up news.

"Of course, you knew," said he, "when I did not come back all night, that I had to be with Spencer. Good God ! what a night it has been ! But now, complications having reached their crisis, the knot is about to be cut. Spencer and Sachs—stay, I will tell you from the beginning. At first the poor fellow was hardly conscious of my presence, and, lashing himself in his misery, he tramped up and down his attics from the east to the west, and poured forth his tale of bitter injury in a voice that I thought must shake from his sleep every sleeper in the town. Wounded in his very vitals, my Philosopher was all human. Philosophy applies best to other people ; for, after all, the Philosopher, like the Jew, will bleed if you prick him with the rest of mortals. Rochester, that woman can never know the love she has played with ; even I, lover as I am, I had no suspicion it had rooted so deep. It was the sordid justice of it that cut him sorest. 'What went on before she knew me,' said he, 'I could ignore—nay, what would it have been to me ? No more than forgotten dreams ; for one pure love will create a new virginity. But that she should carry her lips, consecrated by my kisses, back to her ignoble lover—that she should interweave, with our soaring passion,

the unholy web of such an intrigue—oh, the vileness of it!’ To him, you know, Rochester, the very fact of its being with the King makes it ten times worse. A King’s mistress rarely yields herself for love.”

Rochester sighed, and passed his hand over his forehead, wet with anguish.

“After all,” he said bitterly, “her soaring passion may be for the King! You all admired him, even to Mr. Spencer.”

“Ah,” cried Neuberg, “I truly believe that Spencer would almost be glad to think so: anything rather than to see the absolute shattering of the idol! But no! ‘Either she is incapable,’ said he, ‘of any affection, and love to her is sheer wantonness, or else she loved me enough to be ready for a marriage of absolute disinterestedness, but not enough to give up some game of power—who knows?—some sordid feminine triumph, or, yet again—God help us!—money.’ Then he burst out with a roar: ‘She did love me—she did love me for an hour, and that is the worst of all!’” Neuberg paused involuntarily and halted, looking for sympathy into Rochester’s impassive face.

But with white compressed lips the boy stood silent, his eyes fixed on the ground. His own heart had caught up Spencer’s cry, and he said to himself with an exceeding wail of sorrow: “Me too; she loved me for an hour, and that is the worst of all!” But that secret should go with him to his coffin. He was not one of those, he told himself proudly, who brayed their grief to the wind.

"So it went on," said the Guardsman, once more vigorously propelling his companion, "until the day dawned and the first ray of sun, as it leaped into the room, flashed itself on that damned little yellow cup the Circe gave him. As Spencer turned in his stormy walk his eye was drawn to it. Oh, my dear Duke, that was a moment! His fury fell from him; the pity of it overcame him. It all had been to him so perfect, so beautiful, as beautiful as his very dreams. He clasped his hands, he raised a lament that pierced me to the marrow, spoke words unrepeatable and wept, Rochester—wept tears that fell on my heart like lead."

Rochester put up his hand as if to close the indiscreet mouth: it was doubly repugnant to him to hear of this mature man's loss of self-control and to hear of it from his friend's lips.

"It was indeed the very night of tears!" said he, with a little sarcastic laugh. "April showers are in season! Do you think Mr. Spencer would like me to hear all these intimate details?"

Neuberg again stopped in his walk and stared, at first in utter amazement, then scowlingly, at the Duke.

"I understood," said he in a tone of extreme huffiness, dropping Rochester's arm as he spoke, "that you had requested to be considered our friend."

For a second or two the Duke made no reply; but through all his own ill-humour he was sensitive to Neuberg's displeasure. After all, the flower of this first real friendship of his manhood had been sweet.

"Ask me," said he at length, "any service, and see if I be not ready to prove myself your friend."

The placable officer was once more full of eagerness and effusion.

"It was," said he, "for that very reason that I was seeking you this morning. And, indeed, you are right: I have wasted much time in talking when this was the first thing to be settled. Know then, that that beast Sachs actually sought out Spencer this morning, having ridden over hot-haste from the Geisberg, sent by the King (upon what mission we, no doubt, shall never know). Spencer received him like a God, calm in the sense of his own power. The animal was taken aback at seeing me, and wanted a private interview; so I retired into the bedroom. First, all that I could hear was the ingratiating growl-growl of that brute's voice; then Spencer answering very cold and courteous; then once more the growl-growl, and then—oh, the most resounding slap I ever heard in my life—like a pistol shot! Things had come to a head sooner than even I thought possible. I leaped into the room, not a fraction of a second too soon. Sachs had his sabre already out, and my Spencer, in his superb attitude of disdain, would have been run through the next instant had I not flung myself headlong between them. Think of it, Rochester," he went on with a sudden alternation in his voice, "what a grain of infinite smallness between this world and a great catastrophe! A stiffness in the lock, a chair in the way, an uncertain step—we should have been widowed now, and Sachs, the scoundrel, in his right, glorying! In his right,

for you know our military code : he who bears sword by his side must not brook so much as a disrespectful touch. . . . There is nothing like a Philosopher's slap for soundness ! 'Tis even as Spencer was once so much at pains to expound to me : the anger of a benevolent man is mightiest of all."

Rochester, despite his new pessimism, was still boy enough to kindle at the hearing of the deed.

"It was well done," said he ; " I would I had been there ! "

"Yes, it was well done," said Neuberg, with a sigh, and his countenance clouded over as he spoke ; "but now still hangs that good life upon the hazard of a throw. I disarmed the Master of the Horse a couple of hours ago. But this evening, at sundown, I must stand by and see him made a target of one whose existence in this naughty world is of as great price as his own is worthless. And so you must stand by," he added.

"A duel ? " whispered Rochester, whose heart began to beat very fast. "Notwithstanding Mr. Spencer's theories on the subject——"

"Inevitable, of course," interrupted the other shortly. "It was quite settled an hour ago. Without the walls, at sundown—pistols. Sachs chose it : he prides himself on his point-blank skill. Ah, but he is not aware that Spencer can shoot a flying coin ! Well, let us hope our Professor may outshoot as well as outride the Royal Pander."

"Of course, I consent to act as Mr. Spencer's second," said the Duke, with his grandest air.

"Well, keep a close mouth about it," answered Neuberg brutally, "for you know the Royal rescript: it is two years' fortress for any officer to fight himself or aid and abet any duel the circumstances of which have not been laid before his Majesty and considered in what is called the Court of Honour. Our great King is an honourable man! However, Sachs would die rather than own that he had been struck and that the striker was still walking; so he will risk for once the Royal frown—he has not much fear of it lasting long . . . the useful fellow! But he had better look out: His Majesty will tolerate anything better than failure. As for me, there is in this good right arm"—striking with a youthful gesture the blue sleeve—"what will make Sach's remaining yellow cheek match the fine red one Spencer gave him, should a friend's aim prove less potent than his fist. Pray God it may not! But should it come about, then, my God! for every drop of Michael's generous blood I shall draw an ounce of the fellow's yellow slime." His lip trembled over the menacing words. "Well, time slips; I must run, Rochester; the King's audience hour is nearly out . . . and I have that to do which cannot be put off."

An enigmatic look came over his face as he spoke; it was as if the open page, where usually all was written clear had suddenly grown blank.

"Now," said he, "hie you back to Spencer. I will meet you there. You will find the dear fellow quite himself. He received from Paris this morning a request for a course of lectures, the prospect of the

set work aroused him. This storm clears the air. I left him quoting Shakespeare ! ”

He took two running steps, then came back, unable to resist the impulse.

“ You should have heard him on Sachs ! ‘ Not even,’ said he, ‘ that glimmer of dignity which redeemed blackguard Pistol’s sordid course, *Pray, Sir Pandarus of Troy, and by my side wear steel !* ’ ” Here Neuberg grinned over his shoulder, gave a vigorous tap on his sword hilt, and at a military stride vanished within the Palace gate.

After some mental debate, Rochester, whose humour had been diverted into a considerably less morbid channel by this breezy interview, turned his steps back in the direction of the Gothic house by the river.

Limply he went, for his limbs ached still from last night’s ordeals, and his nervous system had not been built upon a pattern to resist such a change of emotions with the impunity of the Austrian’s iron frame.

To his somewhat hesitating knock, Spencer’s voice responded with such everyday geniality that he felt himself with relief able to enter in a natural, not to say detached, manner.

Spencer, a little pale, a little dark under the eyes, but otherwise the same as usual, raised his head, and greeted the new-comer with a smile. But as Rochester came forward and took his proffered hand he noticed, with a sudden upleap of fellow-feeling that washed away at once and for ever all sense of superciliousness and jealousy, that the Philosopher’s hair

which had but yesterday been but lightly powdered with gray, had turned on each temple as white as silver.

Upon his open desk lay two sealed letters, showing what had been his occupation ; but just then he was bending over a yellow-paged book, an old seventeenth-century treatise on the manners and customs of bees ; and falling back into his seat, Spencer took up the train of thought that Rochester seemed to have interrupted, with a smile and a chuckle of interested amusement.

"Extraordinary," said he, "that in the insect world we should find well nigh as much evidence of intellect as in the so-called higher order of animals ! More so, I may say, for the art of living in community has been brought to a finer degree by the ant and the bee than by the buffalo and the rook. Instinct ? To the average human that little word explains everything. Show him the bee-cell with its solution of the 'maximum and minimum' problem ; show him the ordered hive with its hierarchy, its routine, the self-sacrificing energy whereby the unit strives for the common weal, the provision for emergency, for the prompt re-establishment of social equilibrium ; and he will say to you : 'Very wonderful, my dear sir—instinct !' Show him the police of the ant-hill ; prove to him that these little creatures not only see and hear, but reason accordingly ; that they have memory as well as foresight ; he will shrug his shoulders—'Instinct !' Superior man, he will refuse a soul to the dog that dies of grief at his master's grave and yet carry in his own body

every unreasoning instinct of the lowest animal ; nay, is not he himself more often led by instinct than bee or ant is ever allowed to be led in its community ? When you and Neuberg hacked at each other in the inn room, what was it moved you ? When I go and stake my life to try and chastise further this man whom I despise and hate, does reason guide me ? No, young man ! Yet you open your eyes at me ; you are amazed to find me calm, to find me myself. That my hand is steady, my soul undisturbed, is reason's power—reason and instinct ! So are we made—strange, clashing compound ; what is of earth will to earth, and what is of spirit will upwards. The struggle lasts till the elements divide." He paused, looked up suddenly and met the Duke's dazed eyes with a full kind glance that seemed, as upon their first meeting, to read the secrets of the soul. Rochester winced, blushing, and cast down his long lids. Spencer remained gazing at him for a minute in silence. There were revealing ravages upon that youthful face. The Duke was too young yet, for all his instinctive reserve, to be able to hide his troubled soul.

"I have to thank you," said Spencer in a somewhat altered voice, "for consenting to stand by me this evening, for you came to tell me that you would, did you not ?"

"Yes," said the Duke, his eyes lighting vindictively.

There was a pause.

"I am much obliged to you," said Spencer at last simply ; "excuse my lighting a pipe. You do not

smoke yourself, I believe. Take the armchair : you look very tired ; lie back."

He filled his pipe reflectively, and began to pace the length of the room after that fashion which in him evoked no impression of restlessness, but rather one of rhythmical repose.

Rochester leant back and a soothing sensation crept over him. The windings of the Philosopher's mind were Chinese puzzles to him, as bootless and unintelligible if ingenious. But the man's presence was strong, magnetic, comforting. Half dozing he watched him, dreamily heard fragments of desultory talk.

Spencer smiled upon him once or twice benevolently and comprehendingly, but went on expounding, with certain pauses for initial reflection, his views upon the policy of the insect world. He had proved at full length, and apparently to his own satisfaction, that their government was infinitely more perfect and systematic than that of any kingdom of Europe, when the sudden opening of the door awoke Rochester with a start, and cut the thread of further paradoxical dispositions.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE door burst open, and upon Rochester's half-dreaming, half-waking visions of honey-flowers, bees and hives, there broke what seemed to be a blue hurricane.

This phenomenon concentrated itself in the middle of the bare space, and began to discharge some of its energy in rolling thunder accompanied by the hurling of bolts. A cap was flung hurtling into one corner; a great azure cloak described fearful circles before being cast with a dull thud against the Philosopher's book-shelves; a belt and an empty scabbard next shot by Rochester's head, to be followed by a meteoric shower of box-straps, epaulettes, decorations, and aiguillettes.

"Blast him!" cried Neuberg. "Blast him, root and branch, bed and throne: Perish all such vermin, say I, be they kings or cobblers! May damnation and disaster dog him and shame shadow him—the Furies flog him and hell-fire roar for him. Curse him! Curse him! Curse him!"

Between stamping and anathematising and struggles to tear off all his trappings at once, Neu-

berg, already panting from his rapid ascent, here fairly lost breath.

One tall boot had gone with the spur-straps, and strips of cloth along with the aiguillettes. With dolman torn down at the neck, he stood motionless for a few seconds, and rolled his eyes on his friends. Then he drew a gasping breath.

"Ah," cried he, "how many days has this been choking me! He was my chief, my master, and not even to you, Spencer, could I say one word against him! Cur! tiger! pretentious upstart! beast! fool! cuckoo! tyrant! hypocrite! bully! the gilded soldier who never saw a fight but through a spy-glass! the legislator who is the first to break all laws of God and man! stern reformer of harmless liberties, moralist who subdues his vile passions . . . with a harem! I have done with him—Heaven be praised! Oh, it does one good to have it out at last."

Upon this Count Neuberg resumed operations; wrenching apart a refractory roll of fastenings, he tore his dolman off, and sent it to join the cloak.

Spencer, recovering from the sudden onslaught, began to question his friend anxiously, yet unable to repress his laughter. "What folly are you about now?"

At this question, the other became all at once liberally sarcastic.

"I suppose," said he, "your Wise Philosophy would reserve for itself the right of committing follies. You had your hour this morning, when you

slapped that fellow's cheek, and you mean to give yourself a further relaxation this evening behind your pistol. But I, who am no Philosopher, am to swallow everything, and continue to wear a badge of the man who has planned against me the deepest wrong and worked to my dishonour as well as to that of my friend. Spencer, you are a fraud—a regular fraud: I have known it a long time. Your speech, my friend, may be that of the wisest of platonists, but your actions are those of the most hot-blooded mortal fool that ever ran the earth. As for me, I am a plain man and act as such. That uniform burnt me like the shirt of Nessus; I have done with it. I gave him my sword first; I laid it on his table without a word. Then—then I spoke, and for once a King has heard a man's true opinion of him."

"Heavens!" interrupted Rochester, who had not been a month in the King's capital without gathering some idea of his special system of paternal government, "you will be thrown into prison for *lèse majesté* as sure as fate; and did you forget the meeting this evening?"

"Prison!" said Neuberg, with a look upon his face that Rochester had never seen there before. "The Emperor's cousin is not kept in prison by a German Confederation Kinglet."

This revelation of Neuberg's standing caused so much amazement to the young Englishman, who all through their acquaintance had been so conscious of his own eminent social superiority over a mere foreign Count, and this amazement was so openly

stamped upon his face, that Spencer burst out laughing.

"You were not aware, then," said he, "that our Gustaf is a son of the late Emperor's daughter, and that this hot blood of his is half 'Royal and Imperial'? What of it? Does that make any difference in the madcap we know?"

But Rochester, though he hastened, flushing, to disclaim any sentiment but that of immaterial surprise, was nevertheless aware that he was gazing on the ex-Guardsman with quite different eyes. He felt conscious that he himself could not have kept so important an element of his personality for half a day from the knowledge of his friends—felt ashamed of recognition of a breeding vastly superior to his own. Neuberg had attempted no deliberate concealment; it had simply never occurred to him to talk about his Imperial connection, and all the unconventionality of his behaviour, all the Spartan simplicity, the heedless jocularly, that the Duke had hitherto regarded with toleration not unmingled with disdain, now seemed to him proofs of a conception of aristocratic manliness of which he had not even dreamed.

Where Rochester would have hesitated in fear of lowering himself, Neuberg would plunge in, serene in the conviction that whatever he chose to do must be correct.

"Gustaf," said Spencer again, "in God's name what are you about now?"

The scion of the House of Austria had, after this slight relaxation, returned with energy to his former

proceedings. The remaining boot had been with great difficulty removed, and he now was laying hands upon the buckskin breeches that fitted him so neatly.

"If you think," snarled he, looking up vindictively, "that I will keep on a stitch, a thread, of this livery——"

Spencer shrugged his shoulders with a smile, went into his bedroom, and returned with his own dressing-gown in one hand and the morocco slippers in another.

"Here, you lunatic!" said he; and Neuberg, peeling the condemned buckskin from his legs, stood a second a splendid figure, every iron muscle defined in his close riding-drawers, and swung his arms about ecstatically.

"Free!" cried he; "finished with! God be praised! and damn him!" Then he enfolded himself in Spencer's voluminous garment, thrust his feet into the red leather, looked from one to the other of his friends with his own good smile, dropped into the armchair, made a long arm for Spencer's pipe, and called out cheerily: "Now you send Mark to my house for my civil garb—and, stop! let him fetch on his back a few measures of March beer."

CHAPTER XL.

THERE was, a mile outside the town gates, a little outlying powder-magazine, recently constructed upon the latest, most approved system, and therefore jealously guarded from lay trespassers. Its outer ditch was trimmed, turfed, and sheltered. It was an ideal recess for a little affair of honour.

In the golden evening light the shadow of a certain group fell long and black upon the sward as they went through a set of grave manœuvres with as much precision and apparent placidity as if they were carrying out some solemn *pavane*.

The simultaneous sound of two shots that rang out in the still air only disturbed a flight of settling rooks, and evoked the imprudent curiosity of a flying sentry, who, at sight of the officers' uniform, dared not interrupt his tramp.

The long shadows had not grown another inch when three figures in dark civilian clothes quietly took their way back again to the town, while the last rays of the sun splashed against the brilliant uniforms of the other four whom they left in possession of the field—one stretched at full length upon the sod, another bending over him with a glittering

case by his side, the remaining two earnestly conversing together.

There was a certain gravity on the faces of the homeward bound ; they talked in low voices, as men do under the influence of a solemn occurrence.

"Your ball is in his hip, Michael," said Neuberg. "I merely gave a look at him ; but as I live, Sachs will never ride again."

"How horribly he cursed !" said Rochester, who could hardly control his shaking limbs sufficiently to enable him to proceed at Spencer's side, and who, ashamed of his weakness beside these two tranquil men whom no retrospective emotion seemed to influence, tried to conceal it under a pale joke. "Your performance of this morning, Neuberg, was nothing to it."

"Ay," said Spencer, "he has not even the fighting-man's temperament, but let himself be so possessed with fury that he could not regulate his eyesight, and shot so wide that I did not even hear his bullet fly."

"He is a ruined man," said Neuberg ; "for the King will never forgive him, not only for having missed you, but for having been hit himself. Your ball would have been more merciful had it sped through heart or brain."

"Nay," said Spencer, and his placid face was crossed by a momentary bitterness, "he has at least deserved a pension. Who knows, perhaps his very infirmity may make him the more useful man by-and-by ? Such men as Sachs can never long be out of their master's favour."

He halted, and looked across at the town, dark-spined against the rosy sky. Lazily moving like the wings of a great bird, the Royal Standard rose and fell above the glittering roof of the Palace. Around them lay the fertile lands bathed in the evening peace, and the scent of the bean-blossoms and the thousand other savours of the teeming earth hung in the air.

"It is a fair kingdom," said Spencer; "but he will lose it all—mark me, Neuberg, we shall see it, and you, Duke, if from your fair great home in England you care to heed the sound of the little falling throne—he will lose it, he will lose it through this very weakness, this vice, that has this day lost for him the friendship of such men as Gustaf and myself."

His face, in the red glow, seemed touched with something of a prophet's inspiration; his companions were struck into musing, and they proceeded and passed through the city gates without another word exchanged.

At Spencer's door they parted.

"I do not intend," said the Philosopher, "that anyone should suffer for me; we must, therefore, hence from the capital with as little delay as possible. For a little way," he said to the Duke, smiling, "the threads of our fate are still unwoven. To-morrow we three must part—I to Paris, Neuberg to Vienna, and you to England. But get you to your packing, and you to yours, Neuberg."

"Ay," said Neuberg, "I am going to Eva!" He started off running.

"I will have the travelling coach at your door at ten o'clock," Spencer called after him. "Be ready."

"I will be so," said the Duke, who did not relish the idea of coming to explanations with the minions of the King's law.

CHAPTER XLI.

HIS GRACE'S packing was not a proceeding which should have consumed much time, for a young man's travelling paraphernalia, even be he something of a dandy, is of the nature of things soon disposed of. But, wishing to be alone and therefore setting Hans about his master's business in the adjoining rooms, the Duke found himself folding so many memories, bitter and sweet, among his fine garments, and laying so many dead hopes and joys at the bottom of his trunk, that before he could draw a strap the night had fully fallen.

The portmanteau was buckled at length ; wrapped in a many-caped travelling coat his chin sunk inside the high collar, his hands lost in the great cuffs, Rochester sat on the edge of the bulging leather flank, and, by the light of a little candle, paused in melancholy reverie before taking his last farewell of those four walls that had seen so much of his life in so short a time, and, with them, his farewell of an epoch whereof, after all, now that it was irrevocably over, even the sorrow held a subtle sweetness. It was the thirtieth day of his allotted moon of folly.

He was aroused by the rumble of a carriage on

the cobble-stones without, the clatter and tramp of heavy feet on the pavement, followed by a knock on the outer door which vibrated through the house.

"Spencer's coach already," thought he at first ; then started up to listen.

There approached rapidly the loud rhythm of martial steps upon the wooden stairs, and an extraordinary atmosphere of agitation, a kind of unformed rumour, penetrated even behind his closed doors. "The police !" whispered his quick wits.

The tramping feet invaded the next room, rough overbearing voices arose questioning, and that of Hans replying in surly negation.

"Ah, Jemine, hide yourself ; the gendarmes are after you !" came a frightened whisper behind the listener ; and, wheeling round, Rochester saw that in the aperture of the passage door the landlady's daughter stood looking in upon him with round face bleached and starting eyes full of womanly, desperate pity.

The whisper ended in a screech : a large white-gloved hand suddenly appeared round her comfortable waist, and her place was instantly usurped by the green and black form of a gigantic gendarme, who strode pompously into the room, clapped the Duke on the shoulder, and apprehended him in the name of the King.

Rochester's first impulse of angry resistance was promptly quenched by the vision of a second warrior of the same kidney who now entered upon him by the other door, and by the further sight of two others

on the landing with hand on sword, at attention, ready to enforce the majesty of the law.

As any one of these, judging by the weight of the hand upon his arm, could have disposed of his own slight person in an instant, Rochester's British sense of humour came to help him to meet his fate philosophically.

With a slight, modifying smile, he professed himself, in neatest German, prepared to yield himself peaceably to their request ; but he would be grateful, he added, to be informed of the charge brought against him, an Englishman of rank.

"You will be told in due time," returned the officer stolidly, in his broad Saxon. "Forward—close up in rear—march !"

Rochester, taking the beaver which was thrust into his grasp, with as fine an air as if it had been obsequiously handed, clapped it at a knowing angle upon his red curls, and folded his arms.

"Lead on, sir," said he majestically ; "you see that I am ready."

The two gendarmes closed up behind him ; the two others on the landing proceeded. Between them the Englishman stepped with measured paces. In the hall he crossed, with condescending glance, the woe-stricken countenance of the landlady, and as much as could be seen behind an uplifted apron of the convulsed visage of her middle-aged daughter. They were being guarded outside by two more uniformed giants, drawn sword in hand ; his fine dignity fairly deserted him, and he laughed aloud. He was marched, still laughing, into the carriage, packed

as well they might be between the legs and scabbards of three of his escorts; two others mounted behind, and the last gendarme sprang up beside the coachman.

"I see," said the prisoner to the occupier of the seat next him, as this warlike cartload moved off heavily, "that you are extremely careful in your proceedings."

The man, rigid with the sense of his official importance, dimly perceived a sarcastic flavour in this speech; he frowned, and, by the light of the lamp that flashed in upon them as they rumbled on, Rochester saw the chief's portentous displeasure reflected upon the countenances of his subordinates opposite.

For a while Rochester laughed on, earnestly wishing for Neuberg or Spencer or Eva to enjoy the joke with him. But it is poor fun laughing alone, and his face was quite grave again by the time they reached their destination, which was in a very short time, it being an adjunct to the Palace of Justice.

Here the delinquent was brought through several offices, confronted with divers officials, questioned, registered, ticketed, but, with truly Teutonic arrogance, was refused all explanatory answer to his own reasonable inquiries. Finally, he was ushered into an apartment which seemed to be a kind of preliminary station of arrest, and which looked more like a guardroom than an actual prison. It was large and airy, white-washed, stone-flagged, clear and not ill-lit. At each end was a row of plank beds; down the centre a long wooden table and benches;

upon one side a stove, before which, on wooden stools, were seated two gendarmes, smoking their villainous kanaster and conversing affably with each other. As Rochester passed in, a chubby-cheeked sentry inside the door gazed earnestly at him with guileless peasant eyes.

The men by the fire nodded and wished him good-evening, and with a certain good-humoured roughness offered him a stool in the warm. But Rochester, who amongst his qualities had not that of geniality with his inferiors, declined with haughty courtesy, walked to the end of the wooden table, and took his place upon the bench. Here he sat in moody reflection, while the yellow-faced clock upon the wall ticked loudly a long half-hour. As the minutes went by, the young Duke became once more a deeply-injured individual.

He was already following in vision, with inconceivable bitterness of heart, along the broad dark road that he knew so well, the flight of the coach wherein were snugly ensconced Spencer and Neuberg, when sounds without and an interested stir within brought him back to things of actuality.

Then came the cadence of a footstep that struck a familiar ring of a well-known voice, and Neuberg, bringing about him a whole atmosphere of outside freshness and joyous unconcern, entered the place of detention as if it were a ballroom.

But that his friend did not hither come of his own choice was evidenced, Rochester noticed, by the fact that he was accompanied by the very same *posse* that had conducted a ducal prisoner into these precincts.

These, although he had met with such scant ceremony at their hands, performed their office to the new prisoner with every appearance of the profoundest, not to say the most apologetic, respect.

The gendarmes by the fire stood up stiff and saluted, and the arresting-party withdrew, upon Neuberg's careless nod, as humbly as inferiors dismissed.

"Ah!" gaily cried the ex-Guardsman, "you have a fire, I see, and right: the night is chilly. Sit down, sit down! Go on smoking; I wish I had one too! What?" here his eyes, sweeping round the room carelessly, became suddenly fixed and steely. "What?" cried he again, and gave a joyous shout, "my little Rochester—this is luck indeed! Now, by my faith, all that is wanted is our Spencer!"

Rochester rose, smiling, his ill-temper melting away before the other's sunny humour, and Neuberg seized him by the hand and shook it as if they had not met for years. To him the meeting was pleasure unalloyed and required an extra demonstration.

"They took me," said he, "but five yards from Eva's doorsteps, the rogues! My blessed Eva! They nabbed you neatly at home, I suppose? I wonder how they will get good Spencer? He cannot fail us to-night—he, the very head and front of this offending. Well, it is a poor heart that never rejoices. I am as hungry as a hunter! Heyda Feldwebel, is it the rule to starve your miserable prisoners in these dungeons?"

With an obsequious grin the man ran forward.

Neuberg took a gold piece from his pocket, spun it on the table, and pointed to it with his forefinger.

"Your honour," said the man, "can be supplied with what he likes, from where he likes."

"*Evviva!*" cried the officer. "Me seemeth," he went on, once more in English, turning to his friend, "something of the description of a fine capon, golden and hot from the spit, a spring salad, a square of Strasburg pie, a brace of flagons of Bordeaux wine to wash it all down, would tend to lighten the gloom of this durance vile. Eh, my Lord Duke?"

The Duke, as Neuberg spoke, felt a certain new titillation within him that confirmed the words. Dignity is seldom proof against appetite.

Thereupon the Austrian expounded the order to the amiable guardian of their incarceration.

"Double portion," said he, and tossed the coin. "Stay—treble," drawing a companion piece; "keep the change, friend, but treat us well. Send to the Silver Lion; tell them it is for me, and let them look to it. Now march!"

"Spencer," proceeded the speaker, and disposed himself sprawling on the bench in the most comfortable attitude its uncompromising hardness would admit of—"Spencer will be here in the nick of time; I only hope that he may not consider it due to his Philosophy to break a head or two upon the way. That would complicate matters, and might lead to his solitary confinement. Now, that would spoil all the fun. You and I, being ordinary humans, came like lambs, of course, but there is no knowing how these great minds will disport themselves in

such emergencies." Then, suddenly jumping up, but without a change of tone, "Nay, yonder he comes!" said he.

Spencer was standing in the doorway, and the sentry was gaping, as never he had gaped before, at the great figure in the folds of the black travelling cloak, at the majestic, outlandish head. The Philosopher's brow was unruffled, his demeanour, if grave, was serene; his face lighted up for an instant with pleased surprise at Neuberg's Shakespearian shout of "All hail!" But the surprise was transient, and the pleasure alone remained placidly enthroned, as he took a seat beside his friend.

"So our journey is put off," said he; "well, there is nothing like a cheerful acceptance of the inevitable."

"Bravo!" cried Neuberg. "I was afraid that the maxim to-night might have been on the contrary, that the duty of the free-born man is to resist tyranny." He gave a light wave in the direction of the King's bust, which, crowned with a withered chaplet of laurels, looked down on them in grimy severity from over the door.

Here any dissertation on Spencer's part, had he been disposed to deliver one, would have had to give way to more important business, for the door was again opened, to admit, this time, two waiters, carrying a heavy basket between them.

And presently, upon a snowy, red-bordered cloth, sundry covered dishes and dusty bottles were disposed in battle array in front of smiling, expectant faces and brilliant empty glasses. Delicate and un-

wonted savours began to predominate in the neighbouring air.

"May good digestion wait on appetite and health on both!" cried Neuberg, drawing the largest dish before him, and seizing the carving knife and fork.

"For victims of heartless tyranny," said Spencer, and helped himself to a plateful of delicate salad, wherein the subtle fragrance of the chive had not been omitted, "no one can say that there are not compensations."

"For my part," said Neuberg, "I think it is infinitely better than rumbling over stony roads."

"At least, as you said, it is a poor heart," said the Duke, catching the infectious humour of the moment, "that never rejoices; and of course your cousin, the Emperor, will see you out of the scrape, and we shall follow, hanging on your coat-tails."

He had his little point of malice in this speech. Then, lifting his glass: "Let us drink," cried he, "first of all to our deliverer, His Royal Imperial Majesty," and cast a contemptuous look at the bust.

"Hoch, hoch, hoch!" cried Neuberg, who had not swallowed a mouthful of wine yet, but who was already exceedingly elevated. The three raised their glasses and clinked them together.

But there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, and that first beaker of ruby wine for which Rochester's lips were already opening, the song of which through his veins his heart was already anticipating, was destined to reach neither the one nor the other.

Strange noises arose without—noises of scuffle,

of protest, of lament and objurgation. The door burst open, the noises waxed to painful intensity. Then a new prisoner was ushered in, perforce, upon the scene—a very recalcitrant captive, whom two officers of police held by elbow and shoulder and whom a third propelled in the rear.

“Too bad not to leave us in peace,” cried Neuberg angrily, while, with a dismay as unreasonable as it was unconscious, Rochester recognized amid the clamour the accents of a voice hideously familiar.

“The English Ambassador shall know ; the Duke of Wellington shall be informed of this outrage ; England has gone to war for less ! Everyone who has had a hand in this will regret it deeply. I will write to the *Times*. Let the King beware ! I will write to the *Times*. Robbed, insulted, mishandled, a dignitary of the Established Church of England. Have a care, sir ! The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Duke of Rochester——”

With fine linen sadly tossed and stained, sable broadcloth torn and displaced, ambrosial curls lank upon a heated brow, the portly form of a most venerable-looking if dishevelled elderly gentleman, urged by a sacrilegious knee into an unwilling trot, and then cruelly left to its own devices, tottered to a halt at the table, and stood rolling a wild eyeball upon the extraordinary scene that met his gaze.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE Rev. Thomas Smiley stared and passed his hand across his forehead, streaming with perspiration, and stared again.

The events which had so rapidly succeeded each other within the last two hours of his existence had been so unexpected, so monstrous, and alarming, what his eyes now actually beheld seemed so fantastic and incredible that he could hardly persuade himself he was not in an evil dream. Was this place, reeking with tobacco-smoke and the fumes of wine and feasting, a tavern-room or a prison? These feasters, with their uplifted glasses, these rollickers, whom he vaguely perceived to be gentlemen, holding him now under searching eyes, who might they be?

Smiley turned to look from the sentry, who had resumed his march before the door, to the quiet pair of officials smoking before the stove, met on each side the gaze of placid amazement and returned again, increasingly distraught to the contemplation of the supper-party. This time his jaw dropped. He staggered: if not dreaming, was he mad?

"Edward!" he gasped; beheld his truant pupil

rise to his feet with the well-remembered scowl, upsetting as he did so his brimming glass ; and, unless the divine's ears deceived him, the words, " Smiley, by thunder ! Devil take him ! " floated in the air.

The parson tottered yet a few paces forward, and stood supporting himself against the table.

There was, indeed and in truth, Edward Warrender, Duke of Rochester. He knew the very cloak that hung upon those rebellious shoulders, the beaker hat lay but an inch from his hand.

The strain of the situation was intense, but it was mercifully broken by one who seemed to be the eldest of the feasting party.

" As this gentleman seems to be an acquaintance of yours, Duke," said Spencer, half rising in his seat as he spoke, " will you not introduce him and beg him to join us at supper ? "

Rochester made a desperate effort for the command of the position.

" Certainly," said he. " Excuse me, gentlemen. I am surprised myself by this unexpected appearance. How do, Smiley ? My domestic chaplain, sirs. Mr. Smiley—Count Neuberg. Mr. Spencer—Mr. Smiley."

" Oh, Edward, my dear boy ! " said Mr. Smiley, and, staggering round the table, showed a disposition at once to weep and to clasp the prodigal in his arms. " Edward, Edward, the sleepless nights, the days of agony ! Gentlemen, excuse this emotion : I am this young gentleman's tutor—guardian ; I may say I stand to him *in loco parentis*. I have been in the deepest anxiety concerning him." Here

the worthy clergyman's watering eye was fain to shift itself from his pupil's ferocious glare, and fall appealingly upon Neuberg; but, finding that individual sunk in silent laughter, it was turned in despair to Spencer's countenance, upon the perfect gravity of which it rested, at length, with relief.

Addressing the latter then, Mr. Smiley proceeded with more confidence. "Am I right, sir," said he, "in believing you to be a countryman? You may perhaps have heard of me by name—Smiley—the Rev. Thomas Smiley, late of Wadham College, Oxford. My life has been devoted to the education of the youth of the aristocracy."

Emboldened by the sound of his own voice, and by the apparently deferential attention it elicited, "Delightful task," he proceeded, with something of his old pomposity, "to rear the tender thought—to teach the young idea how to shoot."

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Neuberg, his suppressed cachinnation bursting out with all the violence of reaction. "Ha! ha! my good sir; that is exactly what our friend here, Mr. Spencer, has been doing this very evening. You are evidently kindred spirits."

Bewilderment crept again upon Smiley's face.

"The foreign nobleman seems pleased to be facetious," he said to Spencer; "but if, sir, you are also a guide, philosopher, and friend of youth, you will understand my sufferings when, with a petulance which we must excuse as belonging to his years, this young gentleman, my charge, flew from the guardianship of my encircling wings, having previ-

ously obtained from me (by what I can only term subterfuge) all my available supplies."

"Your supplies?" echoed the prodigal, with withering scorn. "Whose money, sir, was it that swelled your lean purse?"

"Your noble relatives, Edward," retorted Mr. Smiley solemnly, "entrusted me with the sole guardianship and responsibility of yourself—appointed me, as I might say, nurse to your tender inexperience upon its first entrance upon the ways of life, and they provided me nobly, generously, with funds sufficient for my responsible post. The funds were mine, Edward—mine as your guardian—for you are still an infant in the eyes of the law, and as such amenable to authority, and incompetent to act for yourself."

"I begin to fear," said Spencer, with mock gravity, "that we have been sadly deceived in our young friend. Believe me, sir, we knew nothing of this; we should not have encouraged him in these evil ways."

Feeling greatly supported by the attitude of his compatriot, Mr. Smiley became magnanimous.

"I shall reproach you no more, Edward," said he. "'Juvenile vitium regere non posse impetum.' I never held my young friend completely responsible for his actions; the Woman tempted him, sir; it is the lot of man. No doubt he has paid bitterly for his infatuation. You yourself, who, as I apprehend, have chosen the same vocation as myself, can conceive the anguish that oppressed my heart when I found that this precious deposit had fallen

a victim to the seductive wiles of an adventuress, such as we are specially warned against by the Holy Scriptures, a painted Jezebel, a singer of the streets, a strolling play-acting wanton.—Merciful heavens ! ”

The ejaculation had barely escaped the lips of the astonished parson before it was strangled in a scream of terror, for Neuberg had sprung up like a tiger, and now faced him with clutching hands outstretched, as if he would seize him by the throat :

“ Canting old crow, another word against the pride of womankind, and it will be the last you shall ever speak ! ”

Unable in his turn to restrain his laughter, Spencer, aided by Rochester, intervened between the unhappy divine and the wrathful lover.

The Duke, rehabilitated in his own eyes by this unexpected move of his friend's, was rapidly sinking all feeling of ruffled mortification into that of boyish mischievousness. Moreover, he had recollected, the flight of time would soon place a triumphant vindication in his own hands.

He helped with a will to draw the incensed officer away from his quarry, while sentry and gendarmes gazed, as on a delightful, if incomprehensible, entertainment.

“ I see how it is,” uttered Mr. Smiley moaningly to Spencer as soon as he recovered sufficient composure to speak, “ I see how it is. I see the whole appalling truth, the whole dreadful mistake ; this is a lunatic asylum, and you are the head-keeper ! But how, how has that unhappy boy come hither ? ”

Even Neuberg's rage was not proof against the unconscious humour of this solution of the mystery. His great laugh rang out once more, confirming Mr. Smiley's worst fears, and was immediately joined, to the latter's horror, by the laughter not only of his reprobate pupil, but by that of the only person whom he had credited with sanity besides himself.

He wiped the perspiration from his brow and covered his pale lips with his hand to hide their spasmodic twitching, looking round with the hopeless terror of the trapped.

"No, no," said Rochester, moved at last with a sort of compassion at the abject spectacle—"no, Smiley, do not be frightened. We are not in a mad-house, only, as far as I can make out, in the arrest room of the Palace of Justice of His Majesty the Ruler of this Kingdom."

The tutor dropped a great sigh of relief.

"And very sorry am I, Edward," whimpered he; then, with a faint effort to straighten his crumpled form into some sort of dignity, "to see you in such a place."

"Your sorrow, Mr. Smiley," retorted the pupil, bowing mockingly, "cannot be as great as mine to meet you here."

"Yes," put in Spencer, wiping his eyes, "where the nurse fails the infant may well have tripped."

Mr. Smiley fell but from one distress into another.

"I assure you, gentlemen," said he, babbling and stammering in his anxiety to exculpate his character—"I assure you, Edward, nothing that I have done has warranted this monstrous, this, I may say,

criminal interference with the liberty of a British subject.—No sooner, Mr. Spencer, had I received the necessary supplies from England than, entreated thereto by urgent letters from this young nobleman's relatives, I felt myself bound to set forth and reclaim the beloved wanderer. When, at length, after divers vicissitudes, I traced him to this city—only this very evening—I naturally applied at once to the Chief of Police for information. Here, sir, I was met from the first with gross discourtesy, not to say brutality, and, upon my displaying some pardonable irritation and severity, coupled no doubt with the unfortunate circumstances of my having been deprived of my passport" (here the Duke smiled cruelly), "I was accused of being myself a suspicious person. At last, sir, I lost my temper, I confess it—to be perfect is not of humanity—I lost my temper, and expressed my opinion of a Ruler who could sanction such tyranny upon harmless and respectable travellers in terms more explicit than polite. Then—oh, heavens!—I was seized in the most unconstitutional manner, handed to the charge of uniformed ruffians, stripped of my luggage, my papers, my very purse, dragged along the streets, forced into this place, as you have seen, where"—here his countenance assumed an expression of the most undisguised woe—"I not only meet most unexpectedly with my unhappy ward, but I am most undeservedly insulted by yonder gentleman, who seems to be his friend and yours, and who, if he is not insane, must at least be in liquor."

"Count Neuberger," said Spencer, gravely, while

that volatile person was once more overpowered by laughter, "conceived that those severe strictures of yours about a certain fair traveller were applied to a lady of his acquaintance, who is respected and cherished by all who know her. That, of course, was his mistake, for your language could not possibly have referred to the lady in question. But you will, I trust, forgive his slight impetuosity out of consideration for the chivalrous instinct that prompted it. Meanwhile our supper is growing cold. We are hungry men, Mr. Smiley; will you honour us and allow us to proceed?"

Mr. Smiley fumbled at his necktie, smoothing with fluttering fingers his dishonoured cloth, gazed dubiously from one to the other, and hesitated. He, too, was hungry.

"Surely," he began, "nothing could be further from my thoughts than to have cast aspersion upon any lady known to Monsieur le Comte."

"Well, sit down, reverend sir," said Neuberg impatiently, "and set to."

"Thank you, thank you," said the clergyman, bowing; "but duty first: an elucidation from my ward of his irresponsible behaviour is imperative. Edward, you cannot think me unreasonable if I ask for a word of private conversation with you?"

Rochester, who had now resumed his seat, coolly filled himself a fresh glass of wine, and, lifting it in his hand, paused, with his eyes on the clock. In a few seconds the strokes of twelve rang out into the room.

"Mr. Smiley," said the young man then, "from

this hour your tutorship ends and my independence begins. It is the first of May. Edward me, no more Edwards, if you please ; for the future I am to you the Duke of Rochester, and, as you behave, your patron."

Smiley started as if a bucket of cold water had been flung upon him. In the emotions and rapid journeyings of the last days he had forgotten the flight of time. He moistened his lips, and twice attempted to speak ; then suddenly his back curved into a servile bow.

"Your Grace——" began he.

"Sit down and eat," said the Duke, cutting him short. And as Spencer, with a curl of sarcastic scorn upon his lips, made way for the deposed and humbled guardian, Rochester again raised his glass. "Will you drink with me upon my coming of age, friends?" said he.

So eager was the future Dean to be included in this favoured category that he forgot his manners, and, seizing uninvited upon a bottle, with a trembling hand poured himself a bumper in which to do honour to the toast.

CHAPTER XLIII.

NEUBERG broke off in the middle stave of a rollicking soldier-song, suddenly aware that no one was listening. He tried all the bottles in turn; they had all done their duty to the last drop of their blood.

"That being the case," said he wisely, "nothing remains but bed." He yawned a mighty yawn, and eyed sideways the row of plank beds.—"Well, I have slept on worse."

He looked round on his companions. Rochester, with elbows propped on the table and with head fallen forward on his hands, was already half asleep. Spencer, one of those in whom generous wine only stirs up the fundamental melancholy of the dreamer, was gazing across at the blank wall, his thoughts far away from the present scene, on God knows what dismal flight. Mr. Smiley, as an epicure, had still a glass of ruby to sip, and was sipping it with an air of dignified and critical gravity which sat comically enough on his disordered appearance and was not unlike that of some dissipated cockatoo.

Neuberg was too sleepy to laugh, and, if truth be told, he was a little fuddled, for his fatigue had

been great and the red wine potent. He knew, too, that the fumes of that wine remain long weighty upon the brain.

"Come," said he, seizing Rochester by the arm—"come to bed, you sleepyhead!"

Rochester, startled, sprang up, inclined to be quarrelsome; but, forgetting his purpose midway in a yawn, threw his arm amicably upon his friend's shoulder.

"Come, Michael," went on the latter; "you will lose your beauty sleep."

Spencer cast a sad awakened eye upon him, sighed profoundly, but rose with the air of a man to whom resistance, however reasonable, is not worth the trouble.

"To sleep," he murmured vaguely, "perchance to dream. Life is but a series of dreams. To dream is sweet, but to wake is bitter."

Linked together, the three shaped their course across the flagged space—a course which, under the impulse of a certain freakishness on the part of Neuberg, the leader, of a certain vagueness on that of Rochester, and of a certain inertness on that of Spencer, described not a few wakelike evolutions before reaching its goal.

Finding himself abandoned, Mr. Smiley hastily gulped his remaining mouthful and prepared to follow the example of his companions.

Despite the fatigues and emotions he had undergone, and the fact that he had secured perhaps a larger share of the flowing bowl than any that night, his well-seasoned head guided his steps with great

majesty to the unworthy couch that awaited him. Upon this his form was presently extended in the only attitude compatible with the roundness of its bulk and the uncompromising exigencies of the planks beneath. Ill at ease, he lay like some gigantic bird in a swoon, and slept and dreamt and groaned—and woke and groaned, while next him, wide-eyed, Spencer, with his hands crossed under his head, sighed with the sadness of his watching heart. Further down, as he had fallen, like a child, with arms limply cast apart and light breath, Rochester slumbered beautiful in boyhood; and beyond him, wrapped in his cloak, Neuberg breathed deep in sleep as profound as a soldier's should be.

* * * * *

When upon the whitewashed ceiling the gray hue of dawn had given place to the first yellow streak of day, Neuberg awoke, stretched himself like a dog, and rose. He had not budged an inch the whole night. His companions were all asleep still, even Spencer at last. But he, with the craving for fresh air and water upon him, went in quest of his guardians to make interest for both.

The good-natured gendarmes offered him their best yellow cake of scarifying soap, a tin bason of water, even a razor and a broken bit of looking-glass. Before their bars the great windows were opened, and the breath of heaven, and the sunshine and the call of sparrows and swallows, came pouring into the detention-room.

The Guardsman was very spruce by the time the

Duke stirred and envied him, and fresh filling of the tin bason was forthwith eagerly demanded. It was a great chagrin to the young man that his smooth chin should yet show no growth worthy of the gaoler's razor; but as a set-off he dipped his curly head into the cold water and emerged with every curl sparkling like a young god rising from the dew.

Spencer was shaving in his turn; the other two were gravely engaged in brushing each other, while they discussed projects and probabilities; Smiley still snored melodiously in the background, when a gentleman, most military-looking under a sombre civilian attire, marched in upon them through an obsequiously wide-flung door. The gendarmes saluted and stood rigidly at attention, and Neuberg, wheeling round, recognised his acquaintance, the Chief of the Police.

"Ah, good-morning, Baron!" cried he jovially.

"Good-morning, Count Neuberg," returned the other, without relaxing from the severity of his official demeanour. "This gentleman, I believe, is the Duke of Rochester? Mr. Spencer, I salute you. There is yet another also, is there not?—the English pastor who arrived in the town last night in a riotous condition. Sergeant, bring up the fourth prisoner in custody."

A sorry spectacle was the poor half-awakened clergyman, as he took rank beside the other three, who, even to Spencer with his half-shorn chin and open collar, looked all such high-bred gentlemen.

"Sirs," said the Chief of Police then with sono-

rous severity, "His Majesty was pleased to send for me at an early hour this morning to communicate his pleasure with regard to you. You, Mr. Spencer, have broken the law by fighting an unauthorised duel, and have made yourself thereby liable to two years' Fortress. You, Count Neuberg, and you, milord, by acting as seconds in this affair, have likewise transgressed against the statutes: the penalty which you have incurred is six months' arrest. His Majesty, however, mindful of the fact that Mr. Spencer, and you also, gentlemen, are not subjects of his own, and that your offence, therefore, is attributable, no doubt, to ignorance or to misrepresentation, has resolved to exercise his Royal right of clemency, and, without bringing the matter to trial, to commute your punishment to banishment from the Kingdom. You will please to be ready, gentlemen, to set out for the frontier in an hour from now. A travelling-coach, under charge of escort, will attend here at that time. Your goods will be sent with you. You are to consider yourselves under arrest, and debarred from holding any communication with anyone in this town until you have been deposited across the border."

"We are extremely sensible of His Majesty's clemency," began Spencer, with the shadow of a bitter smile, when a sudden outburst of clamour on the part of Mr. Smiley interrupted him.

"And what is to become of me?" cried that gentleman piteously, and proceeded to pour forth once more the thrilling story of his woes, his manner varying between the extremes of humility and in-

dignation, as the sense of his injuries or of his helplessness got the upper hand.

"I was coming to you, sir," said the Chief of the Police, cutting him short, at length, at the word "robber," and surveying his lamentable appearance with acute disfavour. "His Majesty has other occupation for his Courts of Justice than the detention of drunken travellers. It is His Majesty's wish that, since you claim authority upon the Duke of Rochester, you should be given a seat in the same coach and opportunity of exercising your rights in another kingdom. Your pocket-book will be returned to you presently, and your luggage sent with the rest. A word of advice in conclusion: try and remember, Mr. Pastor, that the rites of the bottle and of the Christian religion are not in harmony with each other."

This cruel taunt to the one man of the whole accused party that had been absolutely sober overnight almost wrung tears from the parson's eyes—tears which even the prospect of his restored pocket-book and approaching freedom could not assuage.

"Did I not tell you," said Neuberg, as soon as the Chief of Police had retired, "that he would not dare to bring me to trial? And if not me, of course not Rochester; and if neither of us, of course not you, the principal!"

Spencer quietly turned back to his shaving.

"Eva was packing up yesterday," continued Neuberg pensively. "Well, she will not be long after us; but the deuce is in it that I cannot send her a line."

"For goodness' sake, Smiley," said Rochester, interrupting his quondam tutor's vain laments, "stop that horrid noise, and make yourself decent, since you are to be of our party. I do *not* know about your being sober last night; I do know that you drank most of the wine, though!"

* * * * *

It was a silent party that rolled through the wakening streets at the round trot of the official horses—each man occupied with his own thoughts and those of all of them more or less tinged with melancholy. Spencer lay back in the recess of the carriage with folded arms and closed eyes. Neuberger, beside him, restless, shifted his position a thousand times, broke into whistling staves, immediately suppressed, peered now from one window, now from another, in the vain hope of descrying some sign or token of his beloved. Mr. Smiley, disposed to be plaintively conversational, had been ruthlessly snubbed into silence by his stern young patron, and only gave vent to his feelings by a smothered groan at every jolt, a wincing sigh at every involuntary movement. Such soft, ease-loving flesh as his could not with impunity brave the plank bed.

But perhaps it was Rochester's heart that sat the heaviest in his bosom; he had neither Spencer's final acceptance of the inevitable, nor Neuberger's hopeful belief, nor the clergyman's determined egoism to sustain him.

Leaning forward with hands resting on the framework of the open window nearest to him, he watched

every familiar corner emerge into view and disappear, and, with every turning, seeming to be closing for ever a page of his month of fooling.

With what a delicious sense of mystery and indefinite hope he had seen the walls of the town first enclose him in the darkness! With what a sickening sense of flatness, what an all-encompassing premonition of future dulness, he now saw them recede in the blue and gold sunshine of this delicate May-day!

As they rolled out through the toll-gates Rochester thrust his head out of the window and gazed long and earnestly after the receding vision of glistening spires and roofs. The hum of the human bee-hive, the jangle of the church bells, the cheerful noises which at all times seemed so characteristic of the little capital, died away gradually, and the country silence was broken only by the roll and monotonous whirl of their own wheels, the steady trot of their horses and of those of the two mounted gendarmes who accompanied them, or by the song of a lark in a field that rose suddenly as they passed and mocked him with a joyous ironical farewell.

He turned his head and looked forward: before them, through the mist of dust, lay the road, cutting the bare hill like a white tape, stretching upwards and onwards, between fields unbroken by tree or hedge. Beyond lay the sky, faintly blue. It was an image of his coming life, thought the boy—up hill, arid, uninteresting, leading high, but to no visible end.

There was nothing to prevent him from making

his future what he would; but Rochester was one of those to whom ambition, though possessing no charm, though inspiring no passion, forms yet an integral part of nature. The good hound hunts according to his race. The Duke of Rochester must be rich, must be influential, powerful, must play his allotted part in the world, however distasteful, however wearisome that part might be.

He threw himself back against the cushions with an impatient sigh. The book was closed; never again, in all probability, would he be able to live through a single page of such liberty and irresponsibility again. And he was too young yet to look forward to the time when, in a solitary hour, he might unclasp it, and find a fragrant solace in turning over some of its scented leaves.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE party halted at a wayside inn, where their appearance created much astonishment and interest. They were preparing to start again when, at the full speed of a pair of steaming horses driven by a reckless hand, a shabby travelling-coach laden with trunks, band-boxes and parcels of all sizes and shapes, tied together with string, appeared round the corner and clattered in upon the scene.

"Aha, my children!" sang a lady's melodious voice, "have I got you? Not without trouble, I assure you!" And Eva's head, tied up in a lace shawl, with disordered curls escaping on every side, was popped out of the window of the shabby coach.

Neuberg, who had just settled his long legs in the prison carriage, gave from inside its recesses a kind of war-whoop, and bounded out again with so much energy as nearly upset Mr. Smiley, whose equilibrium was already sufficiently disturbed by his recognition of the fair traveller.

"Beau-Sourire!" cried Neuberg, and leaped forward with arms extended. But, respectfully yet firmly, a police-officer interposed the bulk of his horse between them. Neuberg collided, therefore,

with a highly-greased top-boot and recoiled, cursing freely.

"My orders, Herr Rittmeister," said the man of discipline mildly. Neuberg turned purple, reflected a moment, and became reasonable.

"Till the frontier, my darling!" cried he. "Absurd regulation—but still, we are prisoners."

"Oh Lord!" said the lady, "what fools there are in the world! Much use there was then, in such hurry: the music-books are on the top of my last new bonnet, not to speak of the way I am dressed, for every hook and eye is wrong, and I am convinced that I have put my shift over my stays!"

Her lovely rosy face beamed at them from out of its dark frame; the words were tipped with laughter. Her presence had broken upon their dull humours like the sun through the clouds, like the fresh morning air into a close room.

Spencer's face was genially lit up, and the Duke's tenderly softened from its cold self-centred set. Even the policemen had to turn their heads respectfully aside to hide two broad sympathetic smiles.

As for Neuberg, his whole being seemed to swim in very joyousness, as, dancing, he dodged the gendarmes' horses to catch fresh sights of his beloved and waft rapturous kisses to her. Mr. Smiley alone, supporting himself against the wheel of the coach, gazed aghast upon the indecorous presence.

"Well," said Eva, "we need not have been in such a fuss, that is evident. Why, I fluttered that poor Pzribórski to such a degree that he did not

know whether he was standing on his head or his heels ! Is it not so, Pzriborzki ? ”

She jerked her thumb cheerfully backwards in the direction of the rumble, of the accompanist's presence in which the friends now became aware. Hemmed in by parcels and carrying a bird-cage on his knee, he sat, blushing violently to find himself suddenly the cynosure of so many eyes.

“ Na, yes,” went on the Prima Donna, in answer to the different shades of astonishment perceptible on the surrounding faces, “ I am carrying him off with me. It is the pearl of accompanists, and I could not live without him any more than he without me—could you, my Pzriborzki ? And so I am to drive alone, am I ? May I not even have the little Duke ? Oh, come, Mr. Policeman, that poor child cannot have done anything so very wrong.”

Her merry eye roved over the party until it rested on the black figure of Mr. Smiley and suddenly became lit with fresh mischief.

“ Well, I am sure, anyhow,” she said, “ that this Herr Pastor is not one of the delinquents ; if ever innocence and virtue sat enthroned, it is upon that holy countenance. May I not have the company of the reverend gentleman ? It will do me good, I feel it will.”

“ God forbid ! ” cried Smiley in loud tones of horror, and threw out both his hands with a gesture of reprobation.

There was a burst of laughter, led by Eva's treble. The shoulders of the gendarmes fairly shook. The only persons who preserved their gravity were Neu-

berg and the unfortunate clergyman himself, who began to regret his rashness upon meeting the look which the officer now fixed upon him—a look so menacing, not to say so ferocious, that, muttering something about his health, the bad night and the sun, Mr. Smiley fairly turned tail and sought safety in the farthest corner of the carriage.

This was the signal for a general move.

Both coaches started upon the road again; the three friends took it in turn to hang their heads out of the window and exchange distant remarks or signals with Eva, which process much relieved the tediousness of the journey.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE high tide of spring had flooded the well-remembered little border town, the scene of Rochester's first duelling experience, and it had changed the irregular hamlet into a very bower. Not a burgher's house or artisan's cottage but had its plume of lilac-bush, its pink-foamed apple-tree, its bed of gorgeous tulip, or wreath of bursting vine; not to speak, indeed, of the chestnuts in the fountain-square, the acacias in the road-makers' alley, and the ethereal stars of the white and mauve glycine creeping and enfolding the old walls of the inn garden.

The travellers at the Toll House Inn had been received with the confidential welcome due to the well-remembered guest, the obsequious flutter due to a party of such consequence.

They had taken an almost affectionate leave of their police escort in the inn courtyard. Free men once more, they stepped into the orchard green. For out in the flower-scented garden they elected this day to have their evening meal by the light of the setting sun—their last meal together! It had been mutually agreed that partings are best brief; therefore that Rochester should set out by post upon

his further journey this very evening, that Spencer should wait for the mail-coach, while his friends took the divergent southward route.

At Eva's suggestion, Dr. Theophilus Lehmann, pink of seconds and pearl of country surgeons, had been sent a warm invitation to join them ; and his simple presence, his undisguised delight at finding himself once more (against all hope) in such delightful company, greatly contributed to the outward cheerfulness of the hour.

Mr. Smiley, at a broad hint from his new patron, had come to the conclusion that an *al fresco* repast would be prejudicial to his rheumatic tendency, and had decided to take his refection within doors. Therefore all was harmony.

And so the hour passed, with jest and laughter and toast and song—hour of sadness and merriment so subtly blended that it was destined to remain perhaps the most tender memory of Rochester's life.

The sands of the glass now began to run low, and upon the sloping gardens the shadows to grow longer and colder.

Eva sprang up.

"Now," cried she, "one more toast, the final. Let the wine go round again : you have drunk to our liberty, Neuberg's and mine, and let come what may it is sweet ; you have drunk to that perfect happiness which every one of us expects and which none of us will get, that is the inevitable ; you have drunk to the Duke and the Doctor, to the Philosopher and the Pzriborzki, to the Soldier and the Singer : now let us drink to our future meeting !"

The glasses were filled with acclamation, clinked with ceremony, emptied almost with solemnity. As each put down the empty bumper, gravity had taken the place of smiles. A toast to a happy meeting in the vague future can but emphasize the reality of the immediate parting. There was an impressive silence. Two tears gathered in Eva's eyes and rolled unrestrained down her cheeks. Neuberger put out his hands to her: she looked at the brooding face of Spencer with a steady, sad intentness, then heaved a long sigh and slowly put her hand into that of her faithful lover. Spencer's face suddenly beamed; he turned to them with an approving smile.

"At least," he said, "for you there lies happiness for the taking."

But Rochester felt a sense of increasing loneliness creep upon him.

At this moment a servant, who had approached him unperceived, touched Spencer on the shoulder.

"There is a lady just ridden into the courtyard, sir, who desires to see you."

Spencer started to his feet; his face had grown pale.

"Where is she?" he asked.

Even as he spoke the figure of the Countess de Lucena appeared at the head of the little flight of steps leading into the garden. Framed by the doorway under the hanging wreaths of glycine, she stood looking down upon them, her graceful slenderness accentuated by the long straight folds of her riding-habit. Her face, under the shadow of the great-

brimmed hat, shone forth with a sort of pale luminosity.

In amazement too deep for words the friends saw how Spencer walked steadily up to his unexpected visitor ; how the two, with quiet greeting, interchanged a few words ; and then how he gave her his hand, led her down the steps ; how together they strolled past the table, across the green slope, towards the lower garden path.

Neither Spencer nor the Countess vouchsafed a glance upon the company ; she had thrown the long folds of her habit over her arm and showed the springing tread of each exquisite foot in its high riding-boot as she stepped. She had broken a little branch of glycine and held it to her cheek as she looked up at her companion.

The men rose as she went by ; the Duke's heart was beating to suffocation ; but Eva, drawing closer to the table, rested her elbows upon it and her face upon her hands, and followed the two with burning eyes.

The sun flamed crimson and saffron on the horizon, and flooded the world with the glory of its parting look. There was a great silence in the air, when suddenly a thrush on some topmost branch of the tree raised the liquid ecstasy of its evening song.

Beneath on that level path, Rochester watched the two figures pace solemnly to and fro, engaged, it seemed, in earnest communion. With such courtliness did Spencer move, with such grace the woman beside him, that it imparted, he thought, to the

humble inn garden something of the atmosphere of a princely pleasance.

And still the bird sang on, expressing to the lad's fancy all that lay unformulated upon his own heavy heart ; the ineffable beauty of what might have been, the eternal sadness of what was.

Spencer seemed to speak but little ; the Countess much, emphasising her words with a few dainty gestures of the hand that held the mauve blossom. Once or twice she laid it upon his arm. Then, all of a sudden, it was evident that her words ran quicker and more eagerly ; she broke apart from her companion and stood facing him.

Rochester saw her drop her flower, half stretch both her arms to the man, leaning a little forward in an exquisite airy pose, the attitude of the goddess ready to crown the mortal. Just so Diana must have alighted before Endymion.

Watching with a poignancy of emotion which was well-nigh anguish, Rochester beheld Spencer step back a pace and fold his arms upon his breast ; and at the same moment the Countess dropped hers by her side, as a bird might close her wings. She had thrown back her little head ; in silence they were looking straight into each other's eyes. And the watcher knew that two strong human souls had met in the mortal conflict of Pride and Desire ; that the man suffered more from his victory than she from her defeat.

It was a brief moment, charged with the emotions of a lifetime. Then, with a quiet movement, the Countess gathered her skirts together again. Spen-

cer stepped forward, slightly bowing, and offered his arm, which delicately she took—*grande dame* in every deliberate gesture. In silence they paced the garden path again once or twice, and then they began to mount the slope that led towards the house.

Involuntarily Rochester turned to draw nearer to her as she approached. The sun had now sunk, and hyacinthine shadows had taken the place of the golden glamour; filmy vapours were rising from the cooling earth; every tree and flower was wrapped in the mystery of the hour; the thrush's brilliant notes had sunk to those plaintive undertones that sound like the very voice of twilight; and like the very spirit of evening herself, the Countess came up upon them silently from among the blossoms, her eyes shining as the first stars, a misty plume floating about her brow. This time she looked deliberately at each one as she passed, but without pausing, and barely moving her head in response to Neuberg's stiff salute and to Rochester's almost unconscious inclination. But as her glance fell upon the men's faces, her lip curled in an enigmatic smile:—"O virtuous young men," it seemed to say, "did I but choose to lift a finger . . . !"

At the foot of the steps she disengaged her hand from Spencer's arm and, mounting first, passed out of sight. He followed her.

In the gathering gloom of the little party under the lime-trees the two who knew so much already (and guessed so much more) looked at each other without a word. And each face was white in the other's eyes.

"Oh," cried Eva, in a voice of passion, "God save us! That woman again! Why, the whole town was ringing with tales of her this morning! Spencer's duel and Neuberg's stormings have opened every eye. They say she is dismissed by the Queen, who now is ill—heart-broken. My God! can such terrible women be?"

With a sudden impulse Neuberg laid his hand on Eva's lips, and then, stooping, kissed her.

But Rochester, after a furtive glance around him, slipped unobserved down into the dusky recesses of the garden, sought on the ground for a little branch of glycine, which first he pressed to his lips and then thrust into his bosom. Spencer's words of a little while ago recurred and rang in his heart like the toll of a funeral bell: "Happiness for the taking . . . happiness for the taking!" Oh God! what happiness it might have been that had been cast away upon this spot!

* * * * *

With the exactness of the most formal cavalier, Spencer had seated the lady on her horse. The light pressure of her foot still tingled on his palm; while she gathered her reins, he absently caressed the neck of the pretty creature, that he had rescued from Sach's torture, that had known him as master for some days, that still seemed to remember his touch lovingly.

Donna Julia dropped a glance at the downcast face.

"And so," she said, her lips formulating with ex-

quisite caress the language in which they had first spoken of love together—"and so it is ended? Farewell, then; Heaven speed you, Spencer, wherever you may be! To-morrow I go back to my Tuscany. I will always keep Zuleika—in remembrance. You will need no remembrance, you will never forget!"

He looked up and their eyes met for the last time, but he answered nothing. He knew that she spoke the truth; she was not of those that are forgotten. He also knew that, most carefully packed of all his precious things, hidden away in that pile of luggage yonder, was a little yellow cup.

A shade of pain quivered on her face; she took up her reins, signed with her whip to the Jäger, who sat impassive on his horse a few yards away, and under a touch the high-blooded mare carried her swaying out of the courtyard.

Bareheaded, Spencer watched the undulation of the light figure and listened to the cadence of the brisk trot till both sight and sound were lost in the distance. Then he turned to go into the house. Melancholy, as all encompassing as the gathering night, had fallen upon him.

The yard was full of bustle for the speeding of the parting guests.

* * * * *

In a very little while the Duke's chaise, loaded with luggage, stood awaiting him before the door. The diligence in which Spencer had booked a seat was already changing horses.

"Good-bye, Eva," said Rochester, taking her hand. He wanted to add more, to thank her, to assure her of his eternal affection, but he could not bring out another word. He stooped to kiss the kind hand that had nursed him so well ; but she caught the boy round the neck with both her warm arms, kissed him twice, and left her tears upon his cheeks.

Mr. Smiley discreetly scanned the stars of heaven and coughed.

Then Neuberg clapped his friend on the shoulder, and wrung him by the hand.

"You will remember your promised visit?" said the little Duke. "And Eva? and you, Mr. Spencer? and you too, Herr Doctor?"

Oh yes, said they, they would all remember ; they would all be sure to come to him some day—some day !

He got into his chaise ; they gathered on the steps. English John mounted the rumble ; the postilions cracked their whips.

"Think of me sometimes," said the Duke—"sometimes, in the month of April."

With creak and sigh the chaise got under way ; Rochester strained his head for a last look. Eva and Neuberg stood together, hand in hand, and Eva now waved her handkerchief, now clapped it to her eyes. Neuberg's face was red with shouting laboriously jocose valedictory remarks. Spencer, standing a little apart, sent after the traveller a smile and gesture that were sadder than the singer's

tears. The Doctor's yellow bandana fluttered like a giant butterfly.

So they parted. Rochester could see no more for the mist that rose before his eyes. He had never known till now how much he had learnt to love them all.

AN EPILOGUE.

It was autumn upon the land, and night had fallen. A high triumphant wind rode in intermittent fury across the Duke of Rochester's broad acres, here wresting the leaves from the famous oak-trees, there sweeping over miles of yellowing bracken from secret coverts where the deer cowered close, to dash itself against walls that had seen the revels of the second Charles, and housed the sober state of the third George.

Within the great house all was very silent. By the rays of a single lamp that threw more shadows than light, beside a dying wood fire, His Grace sat in the library and, listening to the autumn storm, found an echo of its melancholy in his own thoughts.

There are moments in most men's lives when they are irresistibly impelled to pause and look back upon some distant scene of the road of life already traversed. In very active existences those moments

of vain hearkening to the music of the past may be rare, but they are all the more poignant. It was not often that the Duke of Rochester, the astute statesman of world-wide renown, the great territorial ruler, the princely host, indulged in the secret luxury of such a halt on the way of his busy life. But to-night, with the voice of the year's autumn complaining without, with the sense within him that he himself stood on the threshold of life's autumn, his soul had gone back with a great melancholy to the memory of one glamorous April, which was all that it had really known of spring.

The echoing stillness of a vast and splendid solitude, a fading year, a dying fire, it seemed all an emblem of his life! He was childless, and with him the great name became extinct. He was well-nigh through his forty-first year, and for more than two decades his spirit had walked alone: for the high-born woman who bore his name and went through the world beside him, the friends that gathered round him, consorted with the Duke—never with the man.

To-night it was *the man* who sat by the embers and rested upon a long thin hand a head whereon time had prematurely bleached the ruddy gold. Distant memories were crowding thick upon him; the shadows were peopled by young, friendly forms; bright faces smiled upon him familiarly; voices, the accents of which woke fantastic echoes in his heart, rang in his ears once more—Neuberg, swayed between anger and joyousness; Spencer, dignified, and guileless, eloquent and paradoxical, absurd and

great-hearted ; Eva—Beau-Sourire ! laughing, loving, singing ; and, always wrapt in mystery, with eyes unfathomable and smile sweet with unutterable promise, the Countess de Lucena, the goddess of his young dreams, she who had kissed his lips that April night and revealed to him for one brief flash the paradise of love that he was never to reach again ! They were all with him again.

Life, that had given the Duke so many prizes, had given the man one moon of joy ; for one April span she had led him by the hand, and taught him every sweet note in her gamut from laughter to tears, from longing to ecstasy. And, after that, she had set him in high places, hemmed him in with wealth and duties, conventions and grandeurs, and left him to be content—if he could.

Where were they now in the flesh—these joyous companions, the Singer, the Philosopher and the Soldier ! and where was she, the Pagan, the priestess of Aphrodite ! who might have made such a Duchess ? . . .

In his mind's eye he always beheld Eva and Neuberger as he had last seen them—hand in hand. Had they gone thus through the journey of these twenty years ? And Spencer, the roving spirit, had he kept green that memory (as brief and poignant as his own) of earthly delight and disillusion ? Had he cherished his treasured independence ? or had he mated with some excellent middle-class woman, who respected his papers, endured with pity his great theories, and never dreamed but that all his

musings were devoted to harmless philosophical conundrums?

He would never know; and now he no longer desired to know.

In the first exuberance of his affectionate grief at parting from them, he had written to Neuberg and Eva a loving letter, and another to Spencer, in Paris. But to the first had come no answer. Whether the missive had miscarried, or whether, like himself, the Prima Donna and the soldier had been caught up by the current of a new absorbing existence that whirled them to new scenes and interests and drowned all distant sounds, he would never know.

Spencer had answered—a kindly-worded indefinite note, promising that when he came to England he would certainly accept the Duke's hospitality—and that was the last heard of him.

In a little while, under the influence of his new atmosphere, the Duke of Rochester had come to think of those gushing letters of his with a blush, and by-and-by had begun to congratulate himself on the fact that the visits they had so warmly urged seemed little like to take place. Among others, how would Her Grace have viewed those unconventional, irrepressible guests!

But as time flowed by, his feelings towards the sharers of his one month's fooling had entered upon a different phase. Amidst the barren pleasures, the hard work, the purely intellectual emotions of his existence, the thought of them became a memory so tender as to be almost sacred; and he would not

have changed it for any fresh impression which must needs have brushed away its exquisite April bloom. To him they should remain ever young, ever smiling and storming, ever gathered round that real, ardent, impetuous self of his, which none but they had known.

And Julia de Lucena ! How could he have borne to hear of her growing old, haggard, hard ?—hear of what chasm, in the course of cruel years, her delicate paganism had finally brought her ? To him she should ever be the radiant Diana—the goddess whom not the age nor the disillusion of mere humanity could touch, the Treasure of Beauty in his heart, the embodiment of those dreams from which real life is the hard awakening ! In spite of the anguish that surrounded her image before his soul, like the smoking sacrifice before the altar, to him she should always remain the one passion he had known. Could Endymion have had aught left to give of desire to some mountain main after lying in Diana's arms ?

He rose and went to his desk, and drew from the secret drawer a discoloured morocco pocket-book, which he opened with tender touch. In this were only four little twisted notes, written in finest Italian hand, but of a few lines each.

"*Come and see me, beau Postilion d'Amour,*" ran a line of faded violet ink. And the Duke smiled that smile that is sadder than tears as his eye caught the phrase. Besides these there was a dried flower, that crumbled into powder as he laid his fingers upon it. And that was all.

Life had given the man no more than this—an April month, a memory of folly and frolic, of joy and of the bitterness which paid for it, a kiss from an idealised woman under a starlit sky—and these relics.

THE END.

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